

IRISH Writing

EDITED BY DAVID MARCUS & TERENCE SMITH



THE MAGAZINE OF CONTEM-
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IRISH WRITING

EDITED BY DAVID MARCUS AND TERENCE SMITH
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WORLD WRITING

In a lecture on Sweden delivered in a city of Southern Ireland during the war years, the lecturer, who referred to that country as "Germany without the germ," was rather unfortunately reported in a local newspaper as having said "Germany without the German." It may be thought that an issue of *Irish Writing* which includes work by only one Irish writer suggests something similarly unheard of. Nevertheless, we have undertaken this issue, with a feeling of its appropriateness, in order to celebrate the holding of the XXVth International Congress of the P.E.N. in Dublin this June.

All the writers included in this issue are members of P.E.N. Most of them, in writing to us, have expressed their cordial interest in the life and literature of this country, and some of them have referred to their intention of being present at the Congress. The aim of P.E.N. is well-known to be that of cementing the sympathies between writers of all countries. We are very glad, therefore, to present this issue of *Irish Writing* as a gesture of goodwill and hospitality to those writers who will visit our shores.

Few would deny the existence of a certain spiritual isolationism in Ireland today. What remains less certain is the question as to whether it is a curse or a blessing. Not being another planet, we must share, after all, the fate of the world in which we live. It must concern the Irish writer, therefore, to find the uncertainties expressed by two writers in this issue, Storm Jameson and André Maurois, as to the future of literature. Here, as elsewhere, we are in peril of being overwhelmed by film, television, the trance of mass media, which Miss Jameson sees as a very real menace to the future of writing. More hopefully, however, she is not disposed to see any great tragedy in the disappearance of a large number of "talented, intelligent, interesting, unnecessary books" if it leaves room for the rarer, the undaunted voices, who clarify instead of adding to the general fog which on all sides threatens to benumb our wits. Monsieur Maurois, too, believes that "the fundamentals of art will survive as they survived when the novel replaced the epic, and if new arts are born, the artists of the past will certainly direct them."

The truth—however unpalatable to "honest-to-God" people, so very sure of themselves in our time, and, perhaps, in our country—the truth remains that literature is an art, not a trade. Many, many trades have perished, but what art . . . ?

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ARTURO BAREA

THE WINNER

(Translated from the Spanish by Ilsa Barea)

SEÑORA PAULA PUSHED A SMALL HEAP OF COINS FROM ONE CORNER of the kitchen table to the other, trying to work out the best meal she could give her children on five pesetas. It had to be plain bread and no potatoes, or plain potatoes and no bread. There just wasn't anything else cheap enough. For herself she would prefer bread, with a drop of olive oil—she had half a cupful left—and a little garlic rubbed in, but the four kids wanted something to fill them up. Potato stew, then, with stock from the marrow bone and red pepper fried in oil. Six pounds, at seventy céntimos, would leave her with eighty céntimos. Should she buy a pound more? Señora Paula, thinking that there were always others worse off than oneself, picked two dull, ugly coins from the little heap.

"Here, child, give this to Señora Juana, but don't stop with her, you know what she's like once she gets going. And as soon as Aunt Carmen has given you the jacket she wants Conchi to mend, come home. D'you hear? No hanging about in the streets!"

Encarnita took the two ten-céntimo pieces and tossed them scornfully on her palm. "It's not enough for two suckers. Do you know, mother, two suckers cost twenty-five now!"

"Don't start arguing. The money isn't meant for you. Poor Señora Juana can do with every little bit of help she gets."

"But, mother, others in our house don't give her anything now because they're fed up. She doesn't want to get her broken leg set because it's better for begging, because—"

"Because and because! People are wrong, because—oh, drat the girl, don't make me argue with you."

"Mummy, I'll give you back the twenty céntimos for Señora Juana and you give me twenty-five for me. Honestly, she doesn't need them."

"Indeed she does, you silly girl. We poor people've got to help one another. If we don't who does? And now run along, or I'll box your ears for you."

Ruefully, Señora Paula stared after her daughter's long, narrow back and spindly legs. How thin she was for her seven years . . . and how the little wretch liked to argue, putting her mother in the wrong! Señora Paula wondered whether she ought not to have given those twenty céntimos, yes, and five more, to Encarnita rather than to a beggar who sometimes made as much as fifteen pesetas in a single day. Still, Señora Juana was ill and alone. She was worse off than a woman with four children and memories of a good husband. "We poor people have got to help one another, and

that's all there is to it," Señora Paula said aloud, and took off her apron to go to the market for her six pounds of potatoes.

Encarnita trotted down the street, the two almost weightless coins in her left fist. At the corner, the broad stone ledge which was Señora Juana's customary seat was empty. Even the dirty little cushion had gone, which made Encarnita reject her first idea that Señora Juana was guzzling coffee somewhere near-by. Also, the other old beggar woman had slid nearer and was sitting at an arm's length from Señora Juana's place: something had happened.

"Are you looking for poor Juana, dearie?" asked the old woman. Encarnita nodded. "You're too late, they took her to hospital two hours ago. And a good thing too. We've all got to earn our daily bread, but she was tempting God, she was, and I wouldn't be surprised if she lost her leg as a punishment."

Encarnita turned a grave, inscrutable look on the beggar woman and walked off without a word. This one was worse than poor old Señora Juana. All the same, she was glad that she didn't have to give Señora Juana the twenty céntimos. Mother was silly about such things. Señora Juana was mean, and a fibber. Aunt Carmen was a fibber too, but she wasn't always mean. Perhaps she was going to give Encarnita a twenty-five céntimo piece today, enough for two suckers, and then mother would look doubly silly when she got back those twenty céntimos of Señora Juana's.

The thought of the argument she would have with her mother held Encarnita so deeply enthralled that she marched past the enticing stalls in the square without stopping and staring. But when she came into the doorway of the house where her aunt lived, the crippled woman in the porter's lodge gave her a message: her aunt was out, she wouldn't be back till late, and one of her nieces would have to fetch the jacket after supper.

Encarnita felt cheated. She had been so sure of getting twenty-five céntimos from her aunt this morning, and it wouldn't be the same thing if she were to get them another time. The best about it was that she could have a good look-round in the square without getting late. Anyway, mother was out shopping just now, looking at every stall as if she had the money to buy something. Encarnita had a very good conscience when she stopped in the square. It looked dazzling to her: the leaping fountain with its round stone basin, the narrow ring of lawn round it, the sunshine, and the people drifting about with happy faces (she thought), and above all, the stalls. First Encarnita joined the children round the man who sold corn-ointment, then the swarm round the man who sold odd-looking knives for peeling potatoes, and finally she went across to the raffle.

There the man stood on a three-legged stool, behind a small table on high stilt-legs with a few prizes ranged on its top. Encarnita liked a crystal jar and a glass with a gold rim, but she knew well that these exhibits were only meant for the eyes of the police patrol, and that the real, the forbidden, the incredibly high prize was five

pesetas in cash. She had so often heard and watched the man who always said the same, only varying his little jokes, that she could have rattled off his patter. There he went again:

"Five pesetas, ladies and gentlemen, five pesetas for ten céntimos! I pay higher interest than the Bank at Monte Carlo. A ticket for you, lady? Here you are. You don't want one, granny? Well, think it over, we're honest people here. No swindle! Sixty tickets, sixty numbers, and here in this bag sixty little balls with the numbers—take a look at them, ladies—this clever little boy here will pull out one of them in a few minutes time, and then one of you, ladies and gentlemen, will walk off with the prize, five pesetas. I wish I had a chance to stand there among you and win the prize, but I've got to earn my daily bread, we all do, except gentlemen with money to burn who wouldn't come to our raffle."

Encarnita slipped through between skirts and trousered legs until she reached the core of the crowd, always clutching her two coins in a very hot and sweaty hand. At this round of the raffle, the prize was won by number 36, by Señora Eulogia across the street, who had two sons with good jobs and didn't need five pesetas. Encarnita was annoyed. Without thinking, on tiptoes, she cried in a fluty voice: "One ticket for me!"

"Here, my dear, here, ladies and gentlemen, one ticket for a pretty, clever little girl!"

It was number 3, to Encarnita's disappointment, since she knew that the numbers between one and ten never win a prize at a raffle. Had she dared to interrupt the flow of the man's talk, she would have tried to change it for another. But now he had sold out his sixty tickets and stood very straight on his stool, dramatically shaking the bag with the numbered balls: "And now the prize!" He bent down to a small boy of about four and let him fumble in the bag till he brought out a ball, with a grown-up's poise.

"Attention—the prize-winner!" shouted the man. "The winner is NUMBER THREE. Five pesetas have been won by Number Three. Who is the lucky possessor of the winning ticket?"

Encarnita was paralyzed. Her left hand clutched the solitary coin that remained, her right hand squeezed a small cardboard slip out of shape. It seemed to her that the square was filling with enormous eyes in even more enormous heads, and that they were all staring at her, while a towering giant shouted something into her ears. Only when she heard his announcement, "If no one claims the prize, we shall raffle it again, because we're honest people here," did she grasp the menace. She lifted her right arm as high as she could, and squeaked: "Here, here!"

On her way out of the crowd she had no need to slide through between skirts and legs: a lane opened in front of her and smiling, grinning losers gave her kind advice. "Don't lose it, kid, take it straight home to mother!" The two pockets in Encarnita's apron were filled with clattering coins. Both her hands were empty, so

she suddenly realised: the surviving ten-céntimo piece was gone, and mother would be furious. Giggling at her own foolishness, she rammed her fists into those bulging pockets. Nobody would steal money from her!

And here was the stall she had so virtuously avoided before. This time she boldly faced the miraculous exhibition of gaudy sweets, liquorice-sticks, surprise boxes, paper windmills and what not. The first thing she bought, with a twenty-five céntimo piece that in her mind stood for the one her aunt should have given her, were two suckers. After this the choice became difficult. Encarnita plunged for another four suckers, in different colours, and enough sunflower pips to fill one of her pockets to overflowing. She made room for them by tying her whole wealth of coins into her hand-kerchief; this left her other hand free to get at the pips and shove them into her mouth. While she spat out the sleezy skins of the pips, she contemplated, as her next choice, an apple coated in blood-red caramel sugar and sitting on a convenient little stick. She would be able to lick it without getting her fingers sticky and so annoying her mother.

Encarnita stood transfixed. Only at this moment did she see the terrible problem confronting her: how to explain to her mother. Fear tickled her in the pit of her stomach. She couldn't go home and give mother the remaining money, just like that, as she had intended; she would have to tell her that she had gambled, and taken ten of Señora Juana's twenty céntimos for it, and lost the other ten. No, it was worse than that. She had no longer five pesetas to put on the kitchen table, which would be enough for a meal for the family and might have averted her mother's anger. But she had spent—how much had she spent? Confused, she only remembered that it was a lot more than a peseta. Mother would beat her black and blue for stealing money from the poor, for gambling, and for spending money on nonsense.

Encarnita thought that her mother was cruel and grown-up-stupid, and that it was all Señora Juana's fault, for going to hospital so late, and Aunt Carmen's, for not being at home. It served her mother right if she didn't get the money. But what to do with it? It was impossible to throw it away, though Encarnita could not have said why it was impossible. She could not spend it all on things either, because she would have to explain to her mother how she got them. And mother was cruel, she would beat her, or at least scold her dreadfully. Encarnita's thoughts went round and round like a squirrel in a cage, when she heard the bark of the raffle-man across the square. It was a sign from her guardian angel, she smugly told herself. She would lose all her money at the raffle, leaving only two ten-céntimo pieces. She pushed her way through the crowd, energetically, and bought as much as she dared—a neighbour might see her and tell mother about her astonishing wealth—which was five tickets. Some minutes later she found herself richer by five pesetas. Two tears trickled down her nose as she fled from the kindly laughter of the people.

She knew it was no good gambling on. She would never lose, she would win and win and win. It was a punishment.

The clock struck on the church tower, and increased Encarnita's despair. If she wasn't home soon, mother would box her ears for hanging about "like a tramp." She simply had to hide the money, since she could not get rid of it. But she could not hide so many rattling coins.

No, she didn't want to throw them away. The money was hers. She had won it. She had won ten pesetas, but could not spend them . . . unless her mother knew nothing of it, ever. Perhaps she could hide it and spend it slowly, through a succession of days hung with sweets, sugar-almonds, toffee-apples, fizzy drinks, sponge-fingers—the endless list made her head reel.

Encarnita found a woman at a stall who was only too pleased to get small change and wasn't one of the regulars, so that her mother was unlikely to chat with her. She counted Encarnita's gains and gave her in exchange a five peseta note, three one-peseta pieces, and three ten-céntimo pieces. It made a very small bulge in her handkerchief and fitted snugly into an empty pocket—Encarnita could not remember when and how she had eaten through her stock of suckers. She scattered a few remaining sunflower pips and ran home, once again clutching two bits of vile grey metal in her fist as if she had never let them go. She meant to arrive all hot and breathless, so that her mother would not notice it if she blushed and gave herself away.

"Here you are at last, you scamp," said Señora Paula, and shook her by the shoulder. It was a mild scolding and a mild shaking, but Encarnita burst into tears. It was good to cry. Also, she could hide her face from her mother's eyes. Señora Paula grumbled: "Stop it, I haven't killed you yet. Quick, go and wash, the others will be here any moment." Señora Paula was happy because her potato-stew had an appetising smell, thanks to the marrow-bone stock. She would have liked a loaf of bread, but that couldn't be helped. Others were worse off.

"Where's your aunt's jacket, child!"

"She wasn't home, someone will have to fetch it tonight."

"So you did hang round like a tramp, did you? Well, how's Señora Juana's leg? Did you give her the twenty céntimos?"

"She wasn't there, mother, she's in hospital. Here's the money." She put the two coins down with a flourish.

Señora Paula hesitated, weighing them on her palm. How light they were! Really, twenty céntimos aren't worth anything, she thought, and handed one of the pieces to her little daughter: "Here, that's for you." Señora Paula shut herself up in the kitchen, feeling mean. What could the poor kid get for ten céntimos? One sweet, the cheapest there was. She wanted to give her children the moon and the stars but was unable to buy them a loaf of white bread. It was the fault of war. Señora Paula took refuge in reminiscences of the days before the Civil War when her Pepe was alive, and happiness was in the house.

Encarnita stared with hatred at the coin. Was this all she got, after earning ten pesetas, more than Conchi earned in a day's work at the dressmaker's? Mother was mean. It served her right.

She would tell Conchi about the money. The two shared a bed in the small backroom, and Encarnita liked Conchi better than her big sister, let alone her brother who never even had a glance for a small girl. But Conchi was brave, she would tell her what to do. Last year, when Conchi was only thirteen, she had told their mother that she would give her all her weekly wages, but not the money for overtime, because she wanted to go to the pictures when she felt like it. "The peseta I get for two hours overtime is for me, and if you don't let me keep it, I just won't do overtime," she had said, as bold as brass, and Señora Paula had answered nothing. In fact, Señor Paula thought that six pesetas more would not solve her weekly worries, but would give her truculent daughter a whiff of gaiety, which she needed. So Señor Paula let Conchita get away with it. But her youngest daughter saw it as her mother's defeat and her sister's triumph.

That night the girl's held council in bed, in whispers, for the partition wall was matchboard. Conchi decided at once that she would keep the money herself and dole it out to Encarnita. "Don't be so stupid," said Conchi. "If mother sees it in my pocket, I can always tell her I saved it from my overtime money. I'll give you fifty céntimos one day, and fifty another, and she won't smell a rat because it's my money after all. Give me the lot now, tomorrow you can have fifty céntimos or a peseta, just as you like."

"But mother will notice. You haven't given me money ever."

"You little liar! What about the thirty céntimos last Sunday, and the peseta I gave you on your birthday? No, tomorrow morning, before I'm off, you simply say you haven't tasted chocolate for ever so long, and then you leave the rest to me."

"But if somebody tells mother I was there at the raffle?"

"Then you just say a man gave you the money to buy his ticket for him, because children are so lucky."

"But if she wants to know the man's name?"

"You are slow! Tell her you know his face but you don't know his name, and he lives somewhere near us. It's all so easy . . ."

Under the sheet, the small bundle changed hands.

Next morning the mother made things easier by saying to Conchi: "It's difficult with Encarnita these days before the school starts, she gets so bored at home all alone." Conchi put a hand in her pocket and hauled out a peseta. "Here, kid, have a bit of fun, but don't spend it all at once. I can't give it you every day. And, mother, don't you take it away from her."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Well, it's best to make sure. The fact is, it's my money."

Señora Paula was pleased because Conchi had been kind—not a frequent occurrence—but she did not quite like her tone.

In the next few days it struck her that the two girls were suddenly intimate, giggling and whispering in corners ; she put it down to Conchi's somewhat patronising generosity. There were few days when Conchi did not give at least a pittance to her younger sister, who was quick to spend it. Occasionally Señora Paula felt a pang when she thought of the solid food that she might buy for the same amount, but then she decided that it all came to very little. It would go in a single meal, while those silly things her moody Encarnita brought home kept her happy for days on end. But—was she happy? Every time Encarnita came back from one of her little sprees, Señora Paula saw a look in her eyes which hurt her : as if the girl were suspicious and scared, afraid that her mother might begrudge her those pleasures. Señora Paula hoped Encarnita would grow out of it and have more confidence in her.

Encarnita was afraid. She was suspicious. And she was angry with her mother, for forcing her into complicated lies and for not noticing what was going on under her nose. Encarnita would have liked to fall round her mother's neck, to confess, be scolded, slapped, and forgiven. Or she would have liked to tell her mother, at the top of her voice, how stupid she was and how clever Conchi and she, Encarnita. She was also angry with herself because the sweets began to pall, and because she had eaten up more than five pesetas' worth so that the last chance had gone to put five pesetas, a prize in the raffle, on the kitchen table. Every time Señora Paula was more than usually worried about money and food, Encarnita felt a thief. She cried often, but always gave a good explanation ; in this she was Conchi's apt pupil. Yet she was getting scared of Conchi too. Once, when she hinted at the possibility of giving five pesetas to their mother, Conchi had been nasty, just as if it were wrong to give one's mother more than one had to. Encarnita felt deserted by everybody.

One day Señora Juana sat again on her stone ledge, one leg in a plaster cast stretched stiff in front of her. It shocked Encarnita that the beggar woman had not been punished by the loss of a leg, but rather rewarded, since she got more alms than ever before. Perhaps it was true that not everybody was punished for wickedness and that undeserved rewards did come to some people. Three days running Encarnita gave Señora Juana ten céntimos, always with the explanation that her mother sent them. The third time she was frightened out of her wits because Señora Juana said : "I hope your mother will come past here soon, I'd like to say 'thank you'." Encarnita spent the following nights in terror, inventing and rejecting countless lies she might tell her mother. Mother would never believe that she had given Señora Juana three times ten céntimos out of pity. And Conchi could not help her out with a convincing story, because she did not dare tell her.

Conchi had turned cruel. Each time she gave Encarnita a few céntimos, and many times when she had not given her anything, she cracked dangerous jokes. Afterwards she would gloat about her mother's denseness and candour. Once she gave Encarnita

fifty céntimos "from overtime money," and said to their mother: "Do you know the kid's a gambler? She simply loves the raffle. One day she won five pesetas."

Encarnita burst into tears, and Señora Paula scolded Conchi for her senseless teasing. Secretly, Señora Paula thought her second-youngest daughter a bully who liked to show off her cleverness and earning power to meeker people, like herself and Encarnita, and who would get on in this hard world. Señora Paula wiped Encarnita's tears and gave her ten céntimos, to the girl's deeper confusion. That morning, while her mother was away, Encarnita worked out how much money she had left in safe-keep with Conchi. Why she wanted to know was not quite clear to her. She hovered between the wish to spend the rest quickly and get it over, and the wish to give whatever was left to her mother and get her punishment, which would not be too severe.

There were two pesetas twenty left. The twenty didn't matter, Conchi could keep them. At night, in bed, she said to her: "Conchi, I'd like a peseta on Saturday. Or d'you think you could give me two and say you'd made such a lot of overtime this week? Then I could go to the pictures. I don't want sweets anyway. And mother wouldn't notice anything, because she never does."

"One peseta? Two pesetas? You're daft," Conchita whispered. "How much do you think you gave me—fifty pesetas? What I gave you this morning was the last of the lot."

"Conchi! Please, don't tease me, or I'll cry."

"I don't mind, cry as much as you like."

"But, Conchi, I know I've two-twenty left, I've been keeping accounts."

"You and accounts! You can't put two and two together!"

Cowering under the blanket, whispering and hissing, Encarnita recited off dates, figures, miserable little sums and quantities. She remembered when she had bought a handful of sunflower pips; but she lied about the thirty céntimos for Señora Juana. Suddenly Conchi said with perfect calm: "You're right, there's two-twenty left. So what? I'm keeping it, and if you don't like it you can tell mother."

"You nasty cheat, you thief——"

"Look who's talking?"

"I'm no thief, I gave back the twenty céntimos to mother, and I earned the ten pesetas. I'm not a thief, I'm not, but you are."

From behind the partition wall, their brother shouted: "Stop the damned row or I'll come over with my belt" And their mother's tired voice came from the other side: "Do keep quiet, children."

The two girls kept quiet. Conchi tweaked Encarnita's arm and fell asleep. Encarnita curled up in a tight ball of hatred and misery and it took her hours to go to sleep. When she woke, her sister had gone to work, of which Encarnita was glad. She spent

a peaceful day, with her mind a blank. There was nothing to worry her. But in the evening, when Conchi was back home, she would not look at her and felt shivery. In bed she took care not to touch Conchi.

The following day was Saturday. Encarnita helped her mother with the cleaning of the three bedrooms and was so gay that Señora Paula's worry lessened. She did not ask her daughter what had been the matter with her, because she was convinced that kids were little liars at the best of times. Encarnita, however, was sorry about her mother's restraint. She wanted to tell her that Conchi was a thief, and that everything else was all right, but did not know how to start.

Conchi came home in the evening at the usual time, a little before her elder sister and brother and just when Señora Paula was busy preparing the supper. "Here you are, mother." Conchita put her week's wages on the kitchen table and clattered with a few coins in her pocket. "Why are you staring at me like an owl, kid? I know why, you want me to stump up something for you, you spoiled brat." She took two lead-coloured coins from her pocket. "Take it. You're unlucky this week. Only twenty céntimos. Of course you can try your luck at the raffle. People say little children are lucky." She started to sing a popular tune:—

"One day she won five pesetas.
One day she won . . .
One day she won ten pesetas.
One day she won . . ."

"Because you can win at two raffles, can't you?"

Señora Paula stirred her stew with unnecessary vehemence. What was wrong with Conchi? There she was, staring at Encarnita, and Encarnita staring at her, like two cats about to jump. Señora Paula took the stew-pot from the stove. She thought Encarnita was going to cry or scream any moment now, and wanted to be ready. But Encarnita stayed quiet. Conchi kept quiet. Encarnita dropped the twenty céntimos on the heap of coins which Conchi had put on the table for their mother.

"Mummy," said Encarnita, "can't Augustias sleep in the bed with Conchita, and I with you? I want to sleep with you, and not with Conchita."

"Yes, mother, do take her. I'm fed up with the brat anyway."

Señora Paula wrinkled her brows in bewilderment. "No row, do you hear? I'll think it over. Encarnita, don't you like your sister? It's wrong of you if you don't."

Encarnita rubbed her cheek against her mother's sleeve. "No, I don't like her, and I never will. It isn't wrong, mother. Everything's all right."

For a moment, before the noisy arrival of the others, it was very still in the kitchen, because the child had told her truth and looked happy.

IS THIS, ALREADY, DEATH AND LOVE?

(Translated from the French by Terence Smith)

IT WAS ABOUT THIS TIME THAT MONSIEUR COURBY DIED. I OUGHT to have said that for seven or eight years Monsieur Courby had been our nearest neighbour, living in the flat below our own. His two daughters, one of them quite big, the other as small as myself, will remain for ever Mimi and Tata to me, as I shall never know their real names now. A railway engineer by profession, Monsieur Courby travelled about a good deal, always returning on Saturday to spend the week-end with his family. One Saturday, however, there was no Monsieur Courby, but a telegram for his wife, stating that her husband had died suddenly at his job, in a little railway station in the country.

“Struck down while closing a door behind him,” said my father. “Apoplexy. Nobody could do anything for him, not even the doctor.”

At first I regarded this incident as amounting to nothing in particular, and afterwards, alone in the kitchen with Anna, I had opened the door, closed it behind me, and let myself down against it, till I lay stretched out on the floor, my eyes closed.

“Holy Virgin! What’s the child trying to do?”

“I’m Monsieur Courby . . .”

“By the Madonna, that’s the way to bring misfortune on yourself.”

Anna was our maid. She was a thin Italian girl with prophetic eyes, whose father had been a miner in the collieries at Rochebelle. One might have fancied that he had taken up with him from the depths of the earth two little pieces of coal to make the eyes of his daughter. I don’t know from what part of Italy she came, but she had about her the air of a sybil or of a young necromancer. It was in keeping with this strangeness of hers that every Sunday she would take me for a walk in the cemetery, making me swear on a tombstone that I wouldn’t mention our visit to my parents. This memory is, perhaps, the earliest that I can call my very own. Nobody has ever heard me speak of it, for I kept my promise.

The cemetery at Alés had three enclosures: the Protestant, the Catholic and the Jewish. And Anna would make me choose between them as between one sight and another.

“Is it to the Catholics we’ll go today?” or “Would you like to visit the Protestants?”

If it were the Protestants, she would read the names on the tombstones and the inscriptions beneath them: “His Sun Had Set Before Day’s End” or “Happy And At Peace” or “My

Spirit Rejoices in Eternity." With the Catholics she would again read the names and phrases in Latin, and with the Jews the names which followed some incomprehensible signs. She even taught me to learn by heart some of the epitaphs: that of the Freemason, with the graven image of the eye, the square and the triangle; that of the Socialist; that of the little boy, who, all by himself, waited for his parents to find him there; and that of the soldier killed on the field of battle. The passage of fifty years has not effaced from my memory a facetious refrain which she made me repeat again and again like a lesson:

Here I'm blest!
After toil and trouble
I've come to rest,
Like a bursted bubble.

Truly, the cemetery presented for both of us a spectacle as varied as a fun-fair or the main street with its shop windows. A spectacle in which, at the same time, we participated. Coming on "pearls" fallen from holy crowns, we would carefully replace them, or re-arrange the vases of flowers thrown down by the storms, or sometimes we would weed and trim the more neglected graves. No motive prompted us in these rather futile tasks. No grave in particular had drawn us, since none of my own people was buried there. We came there as to a garden, a garden full of silence, and having nothing to do with the dead.

But the dead were there, all the same. And Anna knew it. Sometimes she would draw me to an open grave, searching in its mound of thick soil for pieces of bone or remnants of a coffin. Then, for an instant, I would be seized with terror, not so much by the bits of skull or thigh-bone—since death and its tokens I entirely failed to understand—as by the fragments of rotten wood, which to me spoke far more eloquently of ruination. The wreck of a boat, smashed to pieces by the sea and thrown up on the shore, would have affected me no less. There was a mystery, a horror which I could recognise, in the rotten timber, consumed by worms or by the elements, and falling away to nothingness, without at the same time losing its substance. Such were my only misgivings—how few and far between!—in this cemetery where I loved to dally, not for a moment seeing it as the domain of the dead.

In aping the death of Monsieur Courby I hadn't a notion of what I was doing. He had fallen backwards—a feat within reach of all. I could do likewise, slowly and comfortably, against the kitchen door, till the back of my head rested on the tiles.

"Little monster," cried Anna, "you'll bring misfortune on yourself. Madame, Madame," she shouted, calling my mother to her aid.

My mother tried to explain to me that one shouldn't joke about death. Death? I couldn't really grasp what the word meant. And for the next two days I continued, surreptitiously, to play my game till I grew tired of it. Meanwhile, I was sent to pay my respects to Madame Courby, and, as was proper, to

embrace Mimi and Tata. Aghast at seeing them in tears and dressed in black clothes against which their hands showed with such a startling whiteness, I had been unable to stir hand or foot, till fearful that I might do the wrong thing, Julienne had whisked me back to our own place. She was the Courby's maid. A buxom girl, with rosy cheeks, who hailed from Langogne in Lozère, she would do whatever our Anna asked of her.

On Monday morning the body of Monsieur Courby was brought home. Although I had been told to stay in the kitchen, I watched from the staircase the arrival of a group of men, dressed in their Sunday clothes, and carrying a large chest with silver handles.

"But where was Monsieur Courby?" I asked Anna, who finding me lurking between the two floors, marched me back to the kitchen.

"In the big box," she replied. "'Tis there the dead are put before they're brought to the graveyard . . . But you know that . . .

"In the chest, shut in . . . , no, no, I didn't know! But, say, Anna, will he never get out?"

"No, never," said Anna, with a gleam in her dark eyes.

The horror of it transfixed me. I understood now what my mother had vainly tried to make me understand.

"Will everybody die like that some day?" I demanded. "Will everybody go into that chest?"

Terrified in her turn, the Italian girl ground her teeth. My mother had enough to do to calm her down.

"Come now, Anna, don't you know the child is impressionable . . . You'll only upset him."

"'Tis he that has upset me," replied Anna.

"Tonight, by the way, you must look after him. We have to watch over Monsieur Courby, with the master. But we can't leave the little one to sleep alone."

The night came. I cannot now remember the season, whether early or late in the year, but I do remember it was a night which seemed to swallow the house in its intense silence. Around me the town, the part of it in which we lived, the house, our floor, all had the air of an enormous chrysalis at the centre of which lay the dead body shut up in its chest. My parents had departed. I was trembling with fear. Anna viewed me with scared eyes. Julienne came, seeking her out. She, too, was terror-stricken and unwishful to be alone.

The Italian girl and the girl from Langogne brought me to sleep with them in a room that belonged to the Courby apartment, a huge room in the basement This is another memory of which I have never spoken till now

I see myself once more in this enormous room lit by a single candle. I feel again the hands of Anna and Julienne as they undress me. I am smothered for a moment by the nightdress which they draw over my head. I am far too scared to cry, and I find

myself lying in the middle of the bed, while the two girls undress themselves without exchanging a word. From the corner of my eye I watch Anna, who prevents her petticoat, already unclasped, from falling to the ground by straddling her legs. She unfolds her nightdress and pulls it over her, while her petticoat falls to the floor. Julienne has already got into bed. Anna in her turn gets in beside me. I lie between the two girls, trembling with fear and cold, but already feeling an obscure warmth.

We talk together for a long while without putting out the light. The hair of Anna and Julienne intermingles on the bolster above my head, and I have only to turn my face a little to speak in the ear of one or the other.

“Say, Anna, what’s he doing now, Monsieur Courby?”

“The dead do nothing,” she tells me.

“Say, Julienne, won’t they open the chest for Mimi and Tata to see him?”

“No, once closed, that chest is never opened again.”

“Never again?”

“No, never more.”

“Never more, Anna?”

“You’ll have to sleep now,” she says, giving me a pinch.

Towards midnight the candle begins to gutter. Neither of the girls has taken thought to bring another one with her, and they have no desire to return to the kitchen. Nothing for it but to put it out before it is quite used up.

“Let it be, awhile,” says Julienne.

Anna sighs, raises herself on her elbow, and in a moment we are plunged into darkness. The house creaks. Somewhere a loose shutter bangs on the wall. My two bedfellows press up to each other. I am lifted as by two waves till I am no longer touching the lower sheet. I lie stretched on the bodies of these two girls who hold each other by the waist, with never a word.

“Anna? Are you there?” I ask, in a whisper.

“Don’t you know I am . . . Of course, I’m here. Julienne too. Don’t be frightened. Go to sleep now.”

No question of sleeping! Terror has me fairly by the throat, but simultaneously a strange well-being rises within me. We have drawn the sheets over our eyes to shut out the dark enormity of the room. A nameless odour assails my nostrils, and I bury myself deeper in the bed, that I may the better breathe it in.

All this is graven deep in this devil of a memory, which holds only what it wishes to hold.

The right arm of Julienne and the left arm of Anna pass over me. I find that by clenching my toes I can feel the skin of their naked thighs. For a moment Anna makes a little sound with her mouth, as if drawing in the spittle between her teeth. Fear clutches me again, but my happiness grows ever more magnified. Julienne utters a low cry. The hollow of the bed sways like a boat.

“Mind the little one,” murmurs Anna, in a choked voice.

All of a sudden, they have relit the candle. They look quite dotty, their hair dishevelled, their eyes shining, their lips swollen and wet. They have dragged a cot beside the huge bed, and in this I am ordered to lie down. By what threats, what promises am I forced to obey them? I no longer remember There, in the night, I crouch, my hands on my knees, my knees up to my chin, chilled with terror, my ear on the alert for every sound. Am I still so fearful of death? I haven't a thought for it now I listen to the rumour of quite another thing, another discovery, a slow sound like a song, a plaint without suffering, the groaning of a joy still incomprehensible.

(The above is an excerpt from a novel in progress.)

THE RETURN

(Translated from the Italian by Julie O'Faoláin)

WHAT IS THIS PECULIAR SADNESS THAT A MAN FEELS, WHO RETURNING after years to a place where he once lived for a long time, pauses, unseen or unrecognised, to observe for a moment the everyday life going on around him? I am trying to understand it, while I gaze from the height of this hill at the heap of grey and black houses that is my village. No one is expecting me. I did not want to tell anyone beforehand, and no one could possibly imagine that I might be here. Why was it that just now I suddenly felt unable to go any further? A short while before I got out of the train, and left the station without any delay. No one recognized me. Having no luggage, no one bothered about me. Walking quickly I soon took the short cut through the vines, but during the climb I began to pant a little. "Eh, I'm not a boy any longer," I told myself. For all that this path had seemed longer to me as I remembered it. Yet here is the village. It appeared unexpectedly, poised opposite me on the slope of its dim and ancient valley. After that, without knowing why, I slackened my pace. Looking around me I discovered a place to sit on the ground, a little way away from the path at the foot of an almond tree. From here I can comfortably see the oldest part of the village.

I suppose it must be already the first hour of evening, the angelus must have just rung. A faint purple mist, formed of damp and the smoke from the chimneys, flutters over the river-bed, blotting out, among the houses and the sheds, the gaps caused by the earthquake. A long line of donkeys and carts coming back from the fields climbs the road by the river, and scatters among the houses. A couple of women dressed in black come out of the church. A man is leaning against the door of a pub. Yet not a voice reaches me, not a sound, perhaps because the wind is blowing the other way. It is like an old silent film, worn and dimly-lit.

In this small place I used to know every stone, every alley, every fountain, and at what hour the children would come to draw water. I knew every door and every window and who was likely to lean out of them and at what moment. This was the closed perimeter of my adolescence, the whole known world and its boundaries, the unchanging scene of all my childish agonies. But—I realize it now—the feeling that made me pause, a while ago, was not the usual melancholy at the inevitable passage of time, but rather the sudden reappearance before my eyes of that

reality which had for so many years existed only in my memory, and with it the vision of a life that is going on in its normal rhythm —without me. Oh vanity, oh illusion, oh deception of the unwitting egotist. Thus, now that I think of it, the continuance of life must seem to the dead, if they are allowed to see it. And now my soul's first painful reaction has dissolved and given way to a more peaceful and impersonal sentiment: that of the inevitable changeability and continuity and anonymity of life.

CHASTITY

BEYOND SUCHOW IS THE SMALL TOWN OF HANCHWANG, JUST BETWEEN a range of tall blue hills, fairly denuded, and the beautiful Weishan Lake, fringed by marsh ground. A row of decorative stone arches stands astride an old road. The sight is common enough in Chinese villages, cities and towns. Looking like decorative gateways, they are monuments to men and women of the past, to scholars who achieved high honours, or to women famous for their virtue. These are the "arches of chastity" celebrating widows who had lost their husbands while young and had remained faithful to their memory for life. Men admire such constancy, but how difficult it is this story will show.

"Come in, Meihua," shouted young Mrs. Wen to her daughter. "It's no way for a grown-up girl of your age to be hanging around the street door."

Meihua came in, hanging her head shamefacedly. She was an extraordinarily pretty girl, with gay red lips, white even teeth and a peach-blossom complexion. Frank, independent and stubborn, she was the type that can be produced only in the countryside. No city-bred flower was this "Plum Blossom." Although she hung her head and came in, her steps were reluctant and her heart still fluttered.

"Other girls are looking," she said to her mother in self-defense and then broke off.

A company of soldiers were marching past their street, seventy or eighty of them. The narrow street echoed with the thump of marching feet on the pebble pavement, with occasional splashes where the street was wet. This was the third company to pass that morning. Not often had the small town seen so many soldiers. Women, as well as men, had come out of their houses to watch and speculate where they were going. The older women came outside and stood against the walls. But the younger ones stayed behind the door screens of latticed split bamboo, which were a wonderful device for seeing without being seen.

But Meihua had come outside the screen and stood on the raised stone curb outside her house, easily noticeable. The young captain bringing up the rear, with an eye for a youthful feminine figure, had spotted her a few dozen steps away. When he passed, the young girl with a peach-colour skin gave him a big, broad smile. He looked and marched on, not without turning his head for a second look.

His brigade had come from Suchow some thirty miles south to root out a gang of bandits which had been hiding in the blue

hills and making increasingly daring raids in the neighbouring districts. In a small town like Hanchwang, facilities for housing the soldiers were limited. Several temples were available, but the officers would be billeted in households where they could at least sleep in comfortable beds.

The captain had this on his mind, and he could be excused if he turned his head to look at the girl and identify the house. Having provided for the soldiers, he appeared that afternoon at the girl's house and asked if he might impose on their hospitality. It was a house occupied by two widows, the girl's mother and grandmother, but he was unaware of it. He explained the situation. The campaign might last a couple of months, and he would be away most of the time, but when he was in town, he would appreciate greatly if they should find it convenient to find a place for him to sleep. They exchanged names and the captain found, to his surprise, that there was not a man in the house.

The girl he had seen that morning was there, visibly excited and waiting for her mother and grandmother to say "yes." The grandmother was an old, wrinkled woman, about sixty, wearing a black velvet band around her head. The mother, young Mrs. Wen, was tall and a little thin, still a pretty-looking woman somewhere around thirty-five, with an unusually high, well-shaped nose and a small, sensitive mouth. She looked like a refined and mellowed version of the young girl, with her youthful vivacity toned down and her emotional fire subdued, but not submerged, and carefully guarded and nurtured. She had drawn a veil of impassivity over her face, and if there was a quiver of a smile when the captain saw her, her lips immediately stiffened. Her quick, intelligent eyes gave the captain the impression of a mystery that was worth fathoming.

It was a slightly novel proposition for this family of three generations of women to take in a strange officer, but a look at the young officer made it easy for any feminine heart to entertain the idea. The captain was tall, with broad shoulders, slim flanks, very regular features and a mass of jet-black hair. He was neither the burly, unlettered, spitting and loud-sweating swashbuckling type one often finds in the army, nor was he prim and stiff and propped up with an artificial dignity as others were. A graduate of Peiyang Military Academy, his speech was cultured and his manners were well-bred. His name was Li Sing, Sing being his personal name.

"I shan't bother you ladies for meals. All I need is a bed, a good place to wash in and now and then a cup of tea."

"This is not much of a house for you, officer," said the young Mrs. Wen. "But if you don't mind it, we'll be glad to have you stay with us whenever you are in town." Her voice was clear and softly vibrant.

The house was shabby enough and a trifle dark. There was a front hall and a back or inner hall, separated by a small yard paved with the fine stone slabs produced in this region. The walls had not been whitewashed for years, the woodwork was discoloured

from over-scrubbing, and the furniture was genteel but bare. They could certainly provide a bamboo couch in the front hall, and Meihua would be sleeping in the inner courtyard with her mother. The presence of the grandmother would be a guarantee against any gossip.

When the two widows saw the captain, their first thought was that here was a man for their Meihua who had already arrived at an age to be married or engaged. She was a striking beauty ; she had many admirers and she knew it. She was known to be a desirable girl of marriageable age. But there was a superstition about the unlucky males of this Wen family. There were already two widows in the family, for both the grandfather and the father had died shortly after their marriage. Since it had happened twice, it could happen a third time, and the man who was going to marry Meihua was practically asking for his own suicide. As they had no property except this house, people were not interested. Young men interested in Meihua were always discouraged by their parents when the question of betrothing her was suggested. And so she had grown up to be a buxom girl of nineteen and was still unspoken for.

There was a great change in the house of three women when Captain Li Sing came. He paid a great deal of attention to Meihua and enjoyed the women's company. He was courteous and respectful to the grandmother and cavalierly charming to young Mrs. Wen. Moreover he was a good talker and rather showily jovial, entertaining and exuberant. He brought into the house of the widows a manly voice and ringing laughter such as they had not known for years. Certainly they hoped he would remain for ever.

His first afternoon, back from camp, Li Sing went looking for the girl and found Mrs. Wen in the inner hall. As yet, he had no idea that the widows he was staying with had quite a unique history and position in the clan, and that a movement had been started by her clansmen to obtain an arch of chastity for them.

He asked where the grandmother was, though he was thinking about Meihua.

"I believe she is in the back garden. Come and see it," said Mrs. Wen.

The garden was very spacious in proportion to the house. There were a few pear trees, some flowering shrubs, and rows of cabbage, leek and other vegetables. It was shut off by the walls of the neighbours' houses, but on the east, a side door led to a narrow valley. By the side door there was a one-room structure looking like a guardhouse, and beyond it was the chicken pen. The grandmother was sitting on an old wooden chair, enjoying the afternoon sun, and Mrs. Wen, dressed neatly in black, her hair set high at the temples in the fashion of those days, walked around the garden with the captain. On her face was a curious mixture of modesty and pride which was enchanting. Her veil of impassivity with a stranger had worn off, but an air of mystery still hung around her as she went round with him, seeming so happy and

contented and proud of her big garden. There was a soft glow in her eyes and a refinement in her features showing a true appreciation of the finer things which, by a happy balance, made her contented as she was. He was quite sure she could have married again any time she wanted to. There was a pungent smell of night soil and Li Sing saw circles of wet earth beneath the cabbage, and the leaves were wet as if they had been freshly watered. He could not believe his eyes.

"Do you mean to say that you take care of this garden all by yourself?"

"No," replied his hostess. "Old Chang does it."

"Who is Old Chang?"

"He is our gardener. Sometimes, when we have melons and cucumbers and cabbage for sale, he takes them to the market and sells them for good cash. He is the most honest man I know." Pointing to the guardhouse, she said, "There he sleeps."

And at that moment, the gardener appeared from the side door. He was barebacked, for it was summer, and his beautiful tanned muscles shone in the sun. He was about forty and his queue was wound round his head in peasant fashion. He had the kind of honest face that is distinctly likeable in whatever station it appears. Moreover, it was the face of a man living a regular, healthy life free from worries, and his skin was fresh and firm. No lines marked his face other than those stamped by regular work and a pleasant smile.

The mistress introduced "Old Chang" to the captain, for that was the familiar name by which he was called. Going to the kerbed wall, he hauled up a bucket of water, and taking a gourd, drank it, pouring the remainder on his hands by way of washing them. The simplicity of it was charming to see. As he was drinking, his Adam's apple going up and down, while the sun shone on his clean, beautiful brawns, the captain saw his hostess's sensitive lips quiver.

"I don't know what I would do without him," said Mrs. Wen. "He does not want any wages. He has nobody to support, and all he needs is his meals and a place to sleep in, and he says he doesn't see what he wants money for. When his mother was living, she used to stay with us, and he was such a good son. Now he is completely alone and without relatives. I've never seen one so clean and honest and industrious. Last year I made him a jacket and had to persuade him to accept it. I think he does more for the family than he ever gets from us."

After lunch, when the captain went back to the garden, Chang was fixing the chicken pen. Li Sing offered to help. Later, he was amused to think that the chicken pen had so much to do with the future of Mrs. Wen, so significant the little details of our life are.

He got to talking with the gardener about his young mistress.

"What a lady!" said Old Chang talkatively. "If it weren't for her, my mother would not have had such a comfortable and happy old age. They say Imperial Tutor Wen is going to get an

arch of chastity for them. Old Mrs. Wen lost her husband when she was twenty ; her only son got married to the young Mrs. It was so long ago now, but I heard how he was combing his hair one morning, had a stroke and just fell dead on the floor. The young Mrs. became a widow at the young age of eighteen, and she was expecting a child, too. But it was a girl. I have seen Meihua grow up into such a pretty young one. Captain, why don't you marry her? She will make a wonderful wife for any man able to support her."

Li Sing smiled at the gardener's simplicity of manners ; he did not have to have the gardener tell him about Meihua's charms.

"What is this arch of chastity?"

"Don't you know? The Li family has the only chastity arch in town, and the Wen clansmen are a little jealous. They wrote Imperial Tutor Wen about these two widows of his own clan. The old widow has kept her widowhood already for forty years. They say the imperial tutor will petition the Emperor to have an arch of chastity erected in their honour. It is very unusual to have two widows in the same house who lost their husbands so young."

"Is this true?"

"Why should I joke with you? Is this something to be joked about? They say the Emperor usually grants a thousand taels of silver along with the permission for the arch. Then she will be rich and honoured. And she deserves it, too. What a lady!"

The captain came and went, although it must be admitted that he was more interested in chasing after Meihua than in chasing bandits. Meihua loved Sing as if no other girl before her had ever loved, and Sing was quite captivated. The girl did not try to conceal her love and admiration for him ; she just gave herself completely to him and told him what she admired in him and why. It might be artifice in the case of other girls the captain had known, but you just sense it when the girl is wholehearted and sincere, and the captain could not help feeling flattered. Meihua was a bubbling kind of a girl, frank, pranky and sometimes even mischievous. Only one thing she never could be, and that was to be witty and sophisticated. She never tried to be.

Their love was naturally made very clear to her elders by the girl's behaviour and by the captain's more restrained, but equally obvious attitude. Since Li Sing was twenty-seven and single, the grandmother was already convinced that this match was predestined in heaven.

Every precaution was taken of course against any impropriety. The grandmother slept in the western, and Mrs. Wen and her daughter slept in the eastern room of the inner court. As soon as supper was served, the door of the inner yard was bolted, and Mrs. Wen took the precaution of bolting her own chamber door. But the mother was deceiving herself. Li Sing sometimes stayed at the camp, so that he could meet the girl outside. Meihua sometimes disappeared in the afternoon and came back later for supper.

Such irregularities always coincided with the days when the captain was not at home or was supposedly not in the city.

Once she came home two hours after supper time, for it was July and the days were very long. Following a road out of town, Sing and Meihua went on a shaded path skirting a large pond which led directly to a wooded hillside. It was a glorious afternoon, and the sting of the noonday sun had cooled off and there was a delightful breeze in the spruce forest where stood rocks covered with shining green moss. In the distance, beyond the pond and its green banks, lay the beautiful lake. With the captain by her side, life was complete for Meihua. They had already sworn love to each other for ever. The girl told her lover how famous her mother was for her beauty in her youth, and how many men had proposed to marry her but she had refused, and Meihua added, strangely to the captain's ears, "If I were in her place, I would have remarried long ago."

"Aren't you proud of your mother?"

"Of course I am. It is that I think a woman ought to have a home with a man, not like this. Perhaps I heard her talk so often about those Confucian ideas that I am sick of them."

"After all," he said, "it takes a virtuous woman to do what she has done."

"What do you think a girl is for?" answered Meihua quickly and spiritedly. "To get married and have a home and have babies, isn't it? It could not have been easy for mother to lose father so young, especially because we are so poor. I cannot help admiring her for it. But—"

"But what?"

"I don't believe in the chastity business."

The captain roared.

"When I grew older, I thought about it. There is a sort of distinction in being a chaste widow and I think mother rather gloried in it. I don't know why I am talking like this."

Sing asked the girl about the arch of chastity which the clan had been expecting for her mother and grandmother.

"I am glad for mother," said Meihua. "But after we are married, we will be gone. And grandmother's health is so frail. What will she do with a thousand taels, living all alone, with nothing to look forward to except another twenty years of lone confinement in glory until she is sixty and dies like a sainted carcass?"

Li Sing was terribly amused. How are you going to tell a young girl with her keen love of life that she was wrong? The girl seemed to talk a lot of sense. She had shared and watched the loveless life of the house of two widows and perhaps she knew what she was talking about.

Suddenly realizing that the sun was setting behind the hills, she said, "Oh, Sing! I must pick up and run along. I didn't know it was this late!"

During the captain's next period of "absence," something happened. Mrs. Wen had heard from neighbours that the lovers

had been seen together in town and once on the road leading to the wooded hillside west of the town. Nothing escaped the watchful eye of the mother. She questioned her severely. Tearfully, the girl admitted her guilt and said the captain had promised to marry her. Mrs. Wen flew into a fearful rage.

"I never thought my own daughter would bring such disgrace to this house! Your grandmother and I have set an example to this town. Now you have sullied the name of the Wen family. How the neighbours will gloat over such a scandal when they find out about it! My own daughter!"

Meihua of course confessed that there were days when the captain was in town without their knowledge and she had met him at some place. She was straight and open enough to tell her mother what she really thought and felt.

"I'm not ashamed," said Meihua, wiping her tears. "No, I'm not ashamed of loving him! I am of age to be married. If you don't like him, find me one good young man, find me one! I am young and will not permit myself to rot in the loveless life of this house. As for you, mother, I don't see anything in the hollow life you call your virtuous widowhood!"

Young Mrs. Wen choked with surprise and bewilderment.

"What are you saying, girl?" she gasped, reeling before her daughter's unexpected jab.

"Yes," said the girl. "Mother, why don't you get married again yourself? You are still young."

"May the lightning cut out your tongue!"

No one but a complete child could have hurled a truth like a bombshell in that naked, straightforward fashion. She had no idea how much she had hurt her mother, how deeply and unexpectedly her words had cut. The thought of the mother marrying again was horrible, shocking, unthinkable. "I have taught you all these years. Girl, have you no sense of shame?"

Mrs. Wen broke down completely and cried pitifully aloud. It is strange how much a sentence, a phrase, a mere word could do at times. All the torments she had endured and could tell nobody about for those long nineteen years now came out in those bitter, salty tears. What had she not endured? And now her own daughter was laughing at her and taunting at her years of sacrifice and self-denial, whose price she alone knew. Not since Mrs. Wen was a little girl had she ever heard anyone question the virtue of a woman's chastity, or the validity of her ideals. It was like questioning the sun. The idea of her remarrying was not really unthinkable, but truly unthought of for all those long years. It was a closed issue long ago. If she had ever had any idea of remarrying, she had pushed it rigidly out of her mind. It was truly unthought of—until now.

Mrs. Wen ceased to scold her daughter. She had crumbled into a heap of misery. Meihua, scared, had not said another word. But the mother seemed to break completely under the daughter's taunt. What Meihua said about the emptiness of a widow's hard

life was only too true. The mother buried her head in her hands upon the table and continued to weep for at least an hour, until Meihua felt very sorry. As she wept, she let her mind drift. Meihua's happiness with the captain was real and convincing, if a little ostentatious. If she had met a young man like the captain when she was young It was such confusion.

Mrs. Wen decided that they had to wait till the captain returned to the house. He might be in the city now and the girl might run away to tip him off, or even run away with him. She therefore locked the girl up to make the captain come to her.

When he returned three days later, Sing was greeted by Mrs. Wen alone somewhat sullenly.

"Where's Meihua?"

"She is all right. She is inside."

"Why doesn't she come out?"

"I was waiting for that question," answered Mrs. Wen in a grim voice, her lips tightening. "I thought you might be in the city and wondering why she didn't come to have a *rendez-vous* with you."

"What *rendez-vous*?" asked Sing in surprise. "I came in only this morning, this minute."

"Don't pretend. I know all about it."

Sing had an idea that their meetings outside had been found out.

"But where is she now? Why doesn't she come out?"

"She will come out, don't worry. I thought you were a gentleman."

Her tone came as near a restrained feminine anger as he had ever heard from her lips. There was again that curious mixture of modesty and pride which so charmed him.

The captain was silent. From the back of the house came Meihua's voice, crying frantically, "Let me out! Let me out! Here I am, Sing! Save me, Sing! Let me out!" She broke into a howl.

"What's all this?" Sing shouted and dashed for the inside. The door of the girl's room was locked and he heard her pummeling and pitiful crying from the inside.

Young Mrs. Wen had followed him to the inside hall and the grandmother had also come out of her room. Walking slowly toward the captain, the old lady said with tears in her eyes, "Young man, will you marry her?"

Sing's face dropped in surprise. He understood now. The girl inside kept crying. "Sing, Sing, let me out!"

"Of course I will marry her. Now will you open the door and let me talk to her?"

The door was opened and the girl came out and fell into the arms of the officer, crying. "Take me away, Sing, take me away!"

Now it was the mother's turn to break down and cry. The captain apologized again and again and tried to comfort her, but it seemed to have nothing to do with the mess. The mother kept

on crying to herself in great misery, a thing which the captain could not understand at the time.

He spoke as if he knew clearly where he stood. He was very sorry for what he had done. But he never had any other thought but marrying Meihua. He took all the blame on himself. He craved their pardon. But here he was, ready to take Meihua as his lawful wife, and he hoped to be their dutiful son-in-law. Meihua sat there, shocking her elders by her happiness.

Now that the crisis was over, the match did not seem so bad after all. The captain's promise of marriage had squared him with the family. The campaign was soon over, and arrangements were made with the captain's mother and Meihua was rather hurriedly married to her husband at Suchow.

The human mind is one of the most unpredictable things in this universe. The short and rather tumultuous romance of Meihua and the captain was ended. But it left a strange effect on Mrs. Wen. Three months later, the grandmother died. The captain came up alone to help his mother-in-law with the funeral arrangements.

Mrs. Wen informed Li Sing that the granduncle of the clan had come to show her a letter from the imperial tutor saying that he would make the recommendation for the chastity arch to the Emperor. It was almost a sure thing. The story had got about and excited the clansmen considerably, and now the whole clan seemed to have an invested interest in the two widows' chastity. Among the Wen clansmen now, the two widows, living and dead, were already referred to as *chiehfu*—Dame Chaste—a term of great honour.

Curiously, Mrs. Wen told all this to her son-in-law without much enthusiasm, and sometimes even with a suggestion of doubt.

“Why, it is wonderful!” said Li Sing, bubbling over. “Aren't you excited?”

“I don't know. How is Meihua?”

Li Sing gave her the news that they were already expecting a child. Mrs. Wen began to tremble. “Why did you wait to tell me? That is real news!”

“Oh, it is hardly as important as the honour of the arch to you, mother,” said the captain.

“The arch!” Mrs. Wen exclaimed contemptuously, “Let us not talk about it!”

Li Sing was surprised at her indifference to such a rare honour. He recalled what his wife had said about another twenty years of “lone confinement in glory.” It was hard to believe that she herself would look at it that way.

“Do you think I should accept it?” Mrs. Wen asked, abruptly returning to the topic. What a strange question!

“It would be insane not to . . .” Li Sing's voice trailed off, as a doubt entered his mind. “Of course, after the arch is granted, your widowhood would be sacred, as it were, in the

Emperor's keeping."

When the funeral was over, Mrs. Wen went back to her house alone. The front and back halls were still covered with hangings of scrolls of condolence, and stretching across the center of the hall was a white silk scroll, the present of the magistrate himself, with the four characters ONE DOOR TWO CHASTE. Living alone in that house, Mrs. Wen had plenty of time for thought of her future. As she looked ahead, she was a little frightened. Only a few months ago, her mother-in-law, her daughter and the captain had filled this house with gay laughter. Too many things had happened one after another—Meihua's romance and marriage, the grandmother's death, this sudden rise to a glorious, but rather dreary height of fame, and the unborn child.

Old Chang had been wonderful throughout the funeral ceremonies, and now seeing his mistress so sad, he came to be even a better help. He did the shopping in Meihua's place, he relieved her of all household worries and of all things that had to do with the outside world, and was able to bring home some income from the sale of vegetable. From her kitchen, she watched the faithful, honest gardener at work, and sometimes in sheer loneliness came out to the garden to talk with him. The garden was completely shut off and no neighbours could see them. A sort of intimacy developed.

But the granduncle called, bringing a hundred taels as funeral gift from the imperial tutor. The granting of the monument and the thousand taels was a practical certainty.

When the granduncle left, Mrs. Wen had a difficult decision to make. Old Chang congratulated her with all his heart. He was proud of his mistress and had never any idea but that she would soon be a famous woman. In fact, to be given an arch of chastity by the Emperor was to be immortal.

Several times, Mrs. Wen wanted to open the question. But how was a lady, and a chaste widow at that, to propose to a man? Several times she went to the garden to discuss vegetables with him. But there was the blue sky and the white sun above, and her modesty and her long years of training prevented her from ever mentioning what was on her mind. She just could not do it. Chang was so absolutely honest, so ruthlessly faithful. He just never thought of her as woman. He was desperate when it all happened.

A baby girl had been born to Meihua and the captain, so they had come to show Mrs. Wen her new grandchild. She was thrilled to hold the pretty little baby, plump and white and warm, close to her breast and croon to her. She had not held a baby for so long and was young to have been a grandmother at her age, which made her very happy.

"Meihua, I am so glad you are so happily married. You must be very proud of your child and your husband."

There were tears in Meihua's eyes. She thought her mother had become more human and had completely, truly forgiven her.

But during the first day of their visit, Meihua saw her mother sitting silently alone and caught a worried expression on her face that she had not seen on her before. She was no longer the self-possessed, contented woman Meihua had always known her to be.

Then the captain learned the astounding news. Coming to the garden, the captain saw Old Chang tilling the ground. To his great surprise, the gardener pulled him to his sleeping quarters. On the gardener's face shone a strange light of happiness, excitement and perplexity.

"Please tell me what to do, captain. I am an uneducated man."

"What is it?"

Old Chang hesitated a second.

"It's my lady," he said.

"Is my mother-in-law in any trouble?"

"No. But captain, you alone can give me advice. I don't know what to do."

"Does it concern you?"

"Yes."

"You must tell me what the trouble is. What happened between you two when I went away?"

The gardener was slow of speech, unused to fine conversation. As he told the story, the captain could not believe his ears. Chang went on slowly and solemnly, and then the captain understood how the highly correct widow that his mother-in-law was had gone about her problem in the most devious way, to achieve something which a young girl like Meihua could do with a simple gesture or a passionate kiss.

The summer nights had been hot and Chang slept half naked on his mat. One night, the week before, he waked up to hear his lady calling "Old Chang." The declining moon was in the western sky, shining directly over his bed, and he saw his lady standing at the door. Hastily he got up and asked whether there was anything she wanted.

"No," said Mrs. Wen. "You are indeed a heavy sleeper. I heard the chickens cackling in the pen and thought some mountain cat was stealing them."

In order to reach the chicken pen, the widow had to pass Chang's sleeping quarters. It must have been three o'clock in the morning. The grass was wet with dew.

"You go in," the widow said. "You may catch cold standing there without a jacket on." But Chang insisted on seeing her to the kitchen door before he turned back.

Chang thought of the little wildcats that came from the mountains to prey on the poultry at night. But he never seemed to hear the chicken cries. He always slept like a top after the day's work.

The next day, Mrs. Wen said to him, "Close the pen well and see that nothing can get in there." "Don't worry," he said. This had never happened before, but on the third night, a wildcat

really messed up the wire and got away with a black hen. Chang awakened when he felt someone covering him with a sheet and his lady was shaking him.

"What is the matter?" he asked as he sat up.

"I saw a *paotse*. He jumped over the wall and got away."

Chang hastily threw a jacket on and they examined the pen and found a big hole in the mesh. His lady pointed out to him where she had seen the wildcat jump over. They did not see any footprints, but when they came to the spot, they found indeed the black hen dead on the flower bed along the wall, with a gory gash in its neck. Chang apologized for his carelessness, but the widow was kindness itself and said to him, "We have lost nothing. I can cook the chicken for supper tomorrow."

"How is it that you are such a light sleeper?" Chang asked.

"Oh, I often lie awake at night. I can hear the slightest noise even in my sleep," replied Mrs. Wen.

They went back to his room, but his lady remained at the door. He saw spots of blood on his lady's dress and finger-tips. Throwing the dead hen to the floor, he poured some water for her to wash her hands. He asked her if she would like to have a cup of tea after all this excitement in the middle of the night. She declined at first, but on second thought said she would: he was fully awake now and was not likely to go to sleep again.

"Shall I bring it to the house?" Chang asked.

"No," she said. "It is so beautiful out here."

"It won't be a minute."

"No hurry," said Mrs. Wen.

She sat on his bed and felt the mat and bare boards and the ragged sheets he had for a coverlet, and said to him, "Old Chang, I didn't know that you haven't a decent coverlet. Why didn't you ask me for it? I'll give you a new one tomorrow." Oh, what a lady!

The next day, when the bowl of chicken was served at supper, his lady reminded him again of the mountain cat. "Have you repaired the pen?" He said that he had of course.

"The cat will come tonight again for the chicken," she said.

"How do you know?"

"Why, he didn't get what he wanted last night. He was too timid. He almost got the chicken, but dropped it when he got scared. He wants the chicken and he knows where the chicken is. Then if he is a sensible cat, he ought to come tonight. Isn't it clear?"

"So I was determined," continued the gardener with his story, "to sit and watch for the cat and told my lady not to bother. I turned the lamp low, and brought out a stool behind the bush, with a heavy briar stick to cudgel the brains out of any damn mountain cat that dared show its paws in my garden. And the moon climbed to the zenith and there was still no cat, and climbed down again and there was still no cat. It was getting chilly and I decided to turn in when I heard my lady's voice calling softly,

‘Old Chang! ’ Old Chang turned and saw my lady in white approaching from the house like Fairy Maku. When she came close to me, she whispered to me, ‘Have you seen anything? ’ ‘Not a thing,’ I replied. ‘Let’s go into your room and wait inside,’ she said to me.

“It was the most beautiful night I ever had in my life, we two sitting there, me and my lady, when all the world was asleep and silent around us. She had given me this new bed sheet that morning. It was so white and new I had not the heart to sit on it and crumple it. Huddled there, we looked at the silvery moonbeams coming through the window. It was as if we had known each other for a long, long time.

“We sat and talked, or rather my lady was talking most of the time, of all sorts of things, of the garden, of life and toil and sorrow and happiness of heart. We agreed on most things, most of all how life could be happy with a little work and a few things one wants. She asked me about my past and how it was I was not married. I told her I could not afford it.

“If you could afford it, would you get married? ” Mrs. Wen asked him.

“Of course I would,” Chang replied.

The widow looked rapt and sort of dreary-looking and seemed unreal to the gardener, with the moonlight falling upon her white face, and her eyes were bright like gems. Chang was almost frightened and wondered where he was.

“Are you real, or are you Fairy Maku coming out in white dress in the harvest moon? ” he asked.

“Old Chang, don’t be silly! Of course I am real.”

When she said that, she seemed still more unreal to him and her eyes were looking at him and yet not looking at him. The gardener could not help looking at her.

“Don’t look at me like that. Of course I am a woman. Touch me.”

She held out her arm. Chang touched it, and Mrs. Wen shivered.

“I am very sorry. Have I frightened you? ” asked the gardener, feeling apologetic. “For a moment I thought you were Fairy Maku coming out on a moonlight night like this.”

The widow chuckled and Chang felt relieved.

“Am I really as beautiful as that, Chang? ” she said. “I wish it would always remain like this. Tell me, do you think that Fairy Maku would love and marry as men and women do on earth? ”

“How do I know? ” replied the honest Chang, still failing to catch the hint. “I have never met Fairy Maku.”

Then Mrs. Wen asked a question which bewildered the gardener. “What would you do if you met her tonight? Would you make love to her? Would you prefer that I am Fairy Maku or I am a woman? ”

“Lady, you are joking. How dare I? ”

"I am serious. Will you be happy if we live always like this—like Meihua and the captain—as man and wife?"

"Lady, I don't believe it. I haven't the luck. What about the arch of chastity?"

"Never mind the arch of chastity. I want you. We can be happy together and live together till great old age. I don't care what the people will say. I have had twenty years of widowhood and that is enough for me. Let other women have it." And she kissed him.

"Captain, what am I to do?" Chang cried in the same breath that he finished the story. "Who am I to stand in the Emperor's way? But my lady said it is all right. She asked me to marry her now, or she would never be able to marry later on. Imagine my lady saying that! She said she would be happy with me and I could support her as we are now. Captain, what am I to do?"

The final idea penetrated Li Sing's head very slowly, for he was bewildered at first and was intent on catching every syllable and nuance of the gardener's words. It was after some hard swallowing that he exclaimed:

"What to do? You idiot! Marry her by all means!"

He carried the news in a flash to Meihua. "I am so glad for mother," said Meihua, and then she added in a whisper to her husband, "Mother must have killed the black hen herself! And there ought to be an arch of chastity for men like Old Chang."

Late that evening, after supper, the captain said to Mrs. Wen, "Mother, I have been thinking. This baby girl of mine has been a great disappointment to you, I am sure. We do not know when we shall have a baby boy who could bear the name of Wen."

Mrs. Wen looked up, not knowing what he was driving at. The captain continued solemnly, looking steadily at the ground, "I have been thinking. You must not laugh at me, mother. Grandmother is dead, and you are lonely living all alone. Old Chang is an honest man. If you will permit me to speak to him, I think he will be glad to adopt the Wen family name when he marries you."

Mrs. Wen blushed all over. She began to say, "Yes, the Wen family name . . ." and dashed into her room.

When the wedding of the gardener took place, it was such a cruel disappointment to the Wen clansmen.

"You never can tell about a woman," the granduncle said.

SUCCESS STORY

AN OLD MAN IN A BROWN BOWLER WALKED SLOWLY ALONG THE path. His narrow trousers, in a pale brown whipcord, were cut in the style of the nineties. The sleeves of his long waisted coat were so tight that one wondered how his great yellow hands could pass through them. He was like an old grasshopper, left over from last year to shuffle when it could not leap. He reached a bench, stared at it for a long moment, tapped it with his stick as if to require something of it. Then he turned himself carefully round, bringing into the spring sunlight, pale as a primrose, his dun face, hollow cheeked and dry ; the great orbits of his sunk eyes ; the long nose fallen at the tip ; his white moustache, of thin separate hairs like glass threads. This face expressed resolution and some alarm. A string of muscle jerked in the shadow of the cheek bone. Suddenly he swung forward from the hips, placed both hands upon the knob of his stick and broke at the knees. His look of alarm became intense, his long flat feet jerked upwards ; he collapsed upon the seat as if his body had telescoped into itself, like a picnic beaker. But in a moment it began to rise again, the clothes to fill. The old man straightened his back, raised his chin, until, upright at last, he pulled down his waistcoat, settled his hat and looked about him. He had now the air of success. His attitude declared, 'good for you, old man, that was well done.'

A small child, a boy of about three, came running along the path with a wooden truck on a string. He carried a whip with which he whipped the truck ; at the same time he pranced up and down and snorted. He was the horse as well as the driver. He passed the old man on the bench, then turned back and made two circles in front of it.

The old man did not notice the small boy. He was still enjoying himself and he had no time to enjoy anything else. He twitched one side of his moustache, spread his knees, stretched out his long thin arms, and pressed down upon the stick so hard that it slipped a fraction of an inch upon the gravel. This startled him ; he frowned at the stick. But at once, ignoring such a trifling incident, he raised his head again and looked defiantly into the air over the small boy's head.

The child, attracted perhaps by the desire for an audience, was making another circle in front of the bench, whipping and prancing. He paused within a foot of the old man's knob-jointed legs in their shining cloth. The old man noticed the boy, looked

at him for a moment with surprise, and then gradually began to smile. A slight flush appeared on the hard dry skin of the cheek-bones. He stooped forward and said, 'gee-gee.'

'Gee-gee, gee-gee,' the child shouted.

'Gee up,' the old man said.

'Gee up, gee up.'

The old man was surprised by his successs with the child. He smiled broadly, his moustache rose, his eyes sparkled, he looked round to see if anyone had noticed this triumph. But there was no one within twenty yards.

'Gee up, gee up,' the child shouted, whipping the cart. At each stroke of the whip he raised his knees higher.

'Gee up, Dobbin,' the old man cried. He laughed, showing rows of china teeth, and swayed his whole body in a circular movement. It was a sitting-down dance of pleasure, a spring ballet. He called in loud confident tones, 'gee up, gee-gee. Gee up, Dobbin.'

'Gee up, gee-.' The child, breathless and panting, stopped close to the old man's knees, and looked up at him with piercing enquiry.

The old man smiled down at him, and put out a knotty finger to touch the round rosy cheek. But at the last moment he hesitated, as if fearing to take a liberty. 'Gee-gee,' he said 'gee up, gee-gee.'

The child suddenly dived for the truck and held it up to shew the old man, who, startled, as by an unexpected condescension, jerked his whole body forward in order to examine it. He nodded, ' nice gee-gee.'

'It's a lorry,' the child said in a loud clear voice.

'Yes, yes, nice lorry.'

Suddenly the child planted the lorry on the old man's knees, and scrambled upon the bench beside him. He had fallen in love with his admirer.

The old man was astonished. He still smiled, and there was still in his eyes the look of success; but apprehension had appeared in the middle of his forehead. He said in a mild hopeful voice, ' gee up, gee-gee.'

But the boy had abandoned that game. He put one hand on the old man's shoulder, and shouted, 'it's a lorry—a lorry.' Then fixing his bright keen eyes on the old man's face, he began to jump up and down on the bench. Each jump became more energetic and more affectionate, that is to say, closer to the old man's legs and body. At the same time, he burst out laughing, and shouted something incomprehensible. The old man's smile was now full of alarm and deprecation. It was like the grimace with which the humble, everywhere, seek mercy from the strong.

The boy, uttering another loud and incomprehensible speech, tripped against the old man's leg and lurched into his lap on top of the lorry. One foot was planted on his thigh, one hand grabbed

him by the coat lapel. He gave another jump, using the coat collar as a lever, and roared with laughter.

The old man's smile had gone. It had been replaced by terror. His mouth fell open. He looked round with a despairing expression; but no one was within call. His body began to sink away, his waistcoat to sag.

Suddenly a small thick-set girl came running across the grass, picked up the truck from the old man's knee, put her arms round the boy's stomach and lifted him to the ground. She said nothing, but her round, rather pale face, expressed the most formidable calmness.

The boy uttered a yell, and grabbed the old man by the trousers. The girl set in her heels and tugged. Neither looked at the old man, who, for his part was too far gone even to move. His only sign of life was a feeble wave, as if to brush the boy's hand from his trouser leg. But he did not actually touch the child's hand. He was too diffident, too polite. His hand performed the gesture of removal, and, at the same moment, disowned it.

The girl gave another heave, and tore the boy away. She bent herself back at an angle of at least forty degrees, to keep his kicking heels from her shins, and staggered across the path, on to the grass. She opened her fingers, dropped the truck, and then, with a powerful jerk forward, planted the boy on his feet as a navvy might strike a crowbar into a pavement.

The boy's legs at once crumpled: He rolled over backwards. His screech was heartbroken and ear piercing. The little girl picked up the truck, put it beside his left ear, and trotted away to some unseen nurse among the trees. The boy suddenly rolled over and scrambled to his feet. His action was full of revengeful purpose. He rushed at the truck and kicked it over on its back. Then he uttered another howl, longer, louder, but more in musical. It was a repeat howl, an encore, with little passion but much recollected artistry.

The old man paid no attention either to his friend or his rescuer. Probably he could not have told, off hand, by whom or what he had been saved. He lay broken in, ravaged like a pie after a birthday party. His very clothes, hat, trousers, waistcoat, seemed in ruins; a little broken heap, from which projected the long insect legs and flattened feet. His mouth hung open; his filmed eyes, pale as bone, gazed forward without expression. It appeared that the grasshopper was dead. Only the finger muscles twitched from time to time, fumbling on the knob of the stick.

The small boy was now forty yards away. He was aiming another kick at the truck, which had already lost a wheel. He had stopped howling. He was laughing so heartily at the new game that when at last he kicked, he missed the truck altogether and staggered sideways with shouts of laughter.

The old man's hands had closed upon the stick. His chin gradually rose from his chest. His neck tilted back. His eyelids blinked, his brows frowned, and he shifted his feet on the gravel.

Suddenly, as if to take an enemy by surprise, he made a plunge forward, swinging his head downwards almost to the knob of the stick. His long thin buttocks rose three inches from the seat and hung suspended. The battle was joined. The issue was in the balance. The hands pressed, the stick swayed, the old man's face was creased with alarm, appeal, desperate resolve. Then slowly he swayed forward, head, stick, thighs. He was on his feet. Gradually his knees straightened. At last he stood upright. He raised his chin, a trembling hand went up to set the hat straight. For a moment he stood. Then all at once he lifted his stick about two inches and struck its iron ferule hard upon the gravel. He had done it again.

THE TELL-TALE HEAD

SHE HAD BEEN TO BED IN HER STOCKINGS, AND IT WAS GOING TO BE even colder than yesterday—she could feel it in her chilblains. In her petticoat, and with her hair down her back, she lit the stove. She slept in the kitchen, which was separated from the shop by a glass-panelled door the panes of which were covered with paper to imitate stained glass.

It was six o'clock, and at that time on a Sunday morning there was nothing stirring anywhere, except Valérie getting ready to go to early Mass. And Valérie made as little noise as she could, so as not to disturb her mother, who slept in the room behind the kitchen. Her black dress and overcoat had been laid out on a chair the night before.

When ready, she turned out the lamp and glanced at the fire to see if it was alight. Passing through the shop, brilliantly lit up by the frosty moon outside, she felt that one of her shoelaces was undone. She was sitting down on a stool to do it up, but, instead of a flat surface, she felt something round underneath her. Jumping up, she saw the hideous doll's head that was always lying about the place.

It belonged to Ninie, the little girl from next door, who was always playing in the shop and leaving her toys about. Particularly that head, that horrible eyless, hairless head.

If Valérie threw it aside with some impatience, it wasn't so much because she hated the sight of it as because her chilblains, cramped in her best shoes, and the thought of the two kilometres walk to church.

The doll's head rolled over the cement floor, coming to rest against the kitchen door. There was no possible room for doubt on that point, for Valérie had been staring at it when she finally sat down and did up her shoelace.

A little figure all in black, Valérie Conche was the one dark splotch on the long white road that led straight to Foussage. On either side of it the fields were dark and bare. She walked fast, though her chilblains hurt more and more. Her nose was red, her eyes watering, her fingers icy in her fabric gloves. She only had another five hundred yards to go when the church bells started ringing for the first mass.

Brushing past other women in black, she went to her usual seat. The murmur of prayers came from the candle-lit altar and Valérie's lips moved too. When she returned to her place

after communion, she muttered the same prayer as on every other Sunday:

O Lord, give strength to my mother so that she can walk once more, and bring it to pass that I become a dressmaker in the town . . . Keep all harm from us . . .

On her way home Valérie still prayed from time to time, chiefly for the benefit of her chilblains.

The first thing she did when she got back was to sit down on the same stool and take her shoes off. For quite a while she sat there, rubbing her tingling toes. It was good to rest for a moment before settling down to the housework. Besides the work indoors there were the hens and rabbits to see to and the goat to tether by the roadside.

And then there was her mother. She had to be washed and dressed and lifted into her wheel-chair . . . On top of it all was the shop. It was only a tiny hamlet, but, even so, she was constantly being interrupted.

Suddenly she found herself staring intently at something—the doll's head. For a moment she couldn't understand why. For the doll's head was no longer up against the kitchen door, but right in the middle of the floor.

Madame Conche was only pretending to be asleep. Valérie knew that perfectly well as she stood, stiff as a poker, by her beside, repeating in a stern voice: "Mother!"

The old woman, whose plump, pink face was like a monstrous baby's, pursuing her innocent little game of make-believe, stirred, blinked, then muttered sleepily: "Back already?"

"Who was it? Gérard?" asked Valérie, determined not to soften.

"Gérard? . . . What do you mean?"

"What did he come for? And how did he get in?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Never had Valérie's face been so set, so hard.

"What did he come for?"

"I haven't seen Gérard," said Madame Conche defiantly.

Gérard was Valérie's brother, a good-for-nothing who, at thirty-two, had never had a regular job, and was constantly asking for money to get him out of some scrape or other.

"We'll soon find out . . ."

Valérie went into the shop and counted the money in the till. To her surprise not a franc was missing.

That didn't alter the fact that the doll's head had moved, which meant that the kitchen door had been opened. Valérie went back to her mother.

"Shift over to the other side."

"What are you going to do?"

As the old woman rolled over on her side, Valérie thrust her hand under the mattress and seized the purse in which her mother

kept her savings, eleven thousand francs, which she guarded jealously. The notes were creased and worn from many countings, and her mother eyed her narrowly as Valérie counted them once again.

And there wasn't a note missing either.

"Come on ! Tell me who came . . . "

"Nobody, Valérie . . . I haven't heard a sound . . . I can't think what's come over you. You're being simply horrid to your poor old mother . . . "

If nobody had come, it could only mean . . .

"Show me your feet," ordered Valérie brusquely.

"I don't see why I should ! . . . What for ?"

But in a thrice Valérie had turned back the bed-clothes. The old woman's feet were swathed in flannel bandages, and Valérie had put clean ones on the night before. There was no mistake about it : they were dirty under the soles.

"What have you been up to ?"

"Me ? . . . Nothing ! . . . What should I have been doing indeed ? . . . You've no right to speak so crossly to me. I'm only a poor old woman who . . . "

"Who's been getting out of bed when my back was turned ! You have, haven't you ?"

Madame Conche began to cry. That was her only answer. She cried quietly, shaking her head as though calling on the heavens to bear witness to the harshness of human kind, and in particular of her daughter Valérie.

Valérie was crying too as she started to make the coffee.

"I suspected it all along," she began in much the same tone as when she said her prayers in church. "I suspected it all along, only I didn't want to think that badly of you . . . And here I've been day after day lifting you into your chair, and if I so much as touched your feet, you've screwed up your face as though you were in agony . . . I can see it all now . . . Only too clearly . . ."

"You're horrid to me," the old woman whimpered.

But Valérie only got more and more worked up.

"The doctor was quite right . . . You remember what he said, don't you ? That you liked to be coddled . . . That if you would only make up your mind to get better . . ."

The shop bell rang, and Valérie instantly regained her composure as she hurried off to serve a customer. For in the shop one must be lady-like. But her anger was waiting for her intact, as she went back afterwards into the kitchen.

"To think of all the years I've wasted, looking after somebody who could just as well have been looking after herself ! . . . But what I want to know is what you got up for. What was it you wanted in the shop ? . . ."

"You're horrid, horrid," whined her mother over and over again. "Are you going to let me lie in bed all the morning ?"

"Of course I am . . . You got up all by yourself just now,

and you can do it again. And there's a lot more that you'll be doing for yourself from now on, for I'm leaving you altogether . . . ”

“ Valérie ! . . . ” pleaded the old woman, aghast, “ Valérie ! You wouldn't do that ! I'm dreadfully sorry if . . . ”

“ What was it you got up for ? ”

“ I don't know . . . But really, Valérie, you can't go . . . Valérie ! . . . ”

“ There's no use saying 'Valérie' like that, for I've made up my mind. You can get along quite well without me. You've got quite enough money, and there's Rose next door who can come in and do for you . . . ”

“ I don't want Rose, and I won't have her . . . I don't want you to go. What have I done, that you should go on at me like this ? ”

They wept, both of them, Valérie stumping to and fro, collecting her things, her mother sitting up in bed, from time to time glancing anxiously at her daughter from the corner of her eye.

“ You'll have to have Rose, whether you like it or not. I'll run around and have a word with her before catching the bus.”

“ I won't let her set foot in the place.”

“ Then you'll stay here all by yourself.”

There was one old suitcase in the house. Valérie got it down and crammed her things into it.

“ I'll send for the sewing machine. After all, I paid for it with my own money . . . I'll get a room in the town and set up as a dressmaker.”

“ You might at least give me some coffee . . . ”

Valérie handed her a bowl.

“ My dear little Valérie . . . ”

“ It's no use trying on that coaxing stuff, for I'm off. In two hours' time I'll be gone.”

“ Well, put me in my chair, anyhow.”

“ No.”

The old woman burst out crying again, screwing up her face into a grimace she knew was touching.

“ All right . . . Now hold tight . . . ”

“ I knew you would . . . ”

“ There ! . . . I've put you in your chair, but I'm going all the same.”

“ Pass me the rug . . . You haven't fed the chickens yet. They'll be dying of hunger.”

“ I don't care if they are.”

“ They've done nothing to you.”

Which was unanswerable. And, of course, Valérie couldn't help going out and throwing them a few handfuls of maize.

As she went indoors, the same question came to her lips: “ What was it you got up for ? ”

“ I don't know . . . I promise . . . ”

“ Not that it makes any difference. The only thing that

matters to me is that you can walk now. And to think that for these last ten years . . . !”

What was it that her mother . . . ?

She made her bed, then her mother’s. For a quarter of an hour she was turning mattresses, thumping pillows, smoothing out eiderdowns.

What was it that her mother . . . ?

At twelve the Vervant bus drew up outside with a screeching of brakes. The driver peered into the shop for any passengers who might be waiting.

“ Any orders, Mademoiselle Valérie ? ”

She weakened. The bus would be passing again in an hour’s time. That would be soon enough. It was warm indoors, and the thought of putting on her shoes again . . .

Besides, she hadn’t yet found out what had lured her mother out of bed. Why wouldn’t the old woman tell her ?

She had no sooner gone back into the kitchen than the shop bell rang. It was Mme. Paillat, who never went to mass, and chose that moment to do her shopping, knowing she’d have the shop to herself.

“ What can I get you, Madame Paillat ? ”

“ First of all a packet of chicory.”

“ There you are . . . ”

“ Half a pound of sugar. A bottle of white wine vinegar . . . ”

“ Have you brought back the empty bottle ? ”

“ No . . . But I’ll bring it back next time.”

“ A tin of sardines,” said Mme. Paillat, holding her string bag over her stomach, “ and while you’re about it you might give me a little glass of something, as I’m not feeling myself this morning.”

It was the same every day. She was never feeling quite herself, and always needed a glass of something to put her right.

“ A litre of paraffin—with this cold weather it goes nowhere . . . You haven’t got any gherkins, I suppose ? ”

“ Oh, yes, I have.”

Valérie moved about cautiously in her Sunday dress, particularly when she came anywhere near the drum of paraffin. She was reaching up for the jar of gherkins when she stopped suddenly, her arms poised in mid-air.

“ Well, I never ! . . . ”

“ What ? . . . What’s the matter ? ”

“ Nothing,” answered Valérie as she lifted the jar down, but she gazed at it in amazement. She had only opened it three days before, and she hadn’t served more than four customers from it, yet there were only a few gherkins left at the bottom.

“ You can give me the lot if you like.”

Valérie weighed them out absent-mindedly and totted up the bill. And she seemed far away as she counted out the change.

The shop bell rang as Mme. Paillat opened the door, and again as she closed it behind her, and once more the mother and

daughter were left alone. Madame Conche seemed resigned. She sat motionless, saying nothing. As for Valérie, she was deep in thought. She no longer kept glancing up at the clock, as she had been doing all the morning.

Slowly she went into the kitchen and began taking off her dress.

“Mother . . .”

“What ?”

“Do you still refuse to tell me ?”

“What’s the use of nagging at an old body who’s not much longer for this world ? . . .”

“What was it . . . ?”

“I’ll die all alone by myself, and you’ll come shedding tears on my tombstone and asking pardon for your cruel ways . . .”

“That’ll do ! What was it the doctor told you you mustn’t eat ?”

“How should I know ?”

“Well I do . . . He told you . . . he told you . . .”

Valérie seemed out of breath, and suddenly she threw herself on her bed in the corner of the kitchen and burst out sobbing.

“You know perfectly well,” she panted. “You know perfectly well : he told you you mustn’t eat gherkins . . .”

The old woman looked up, hardly daring to hope.

“And then when my back was turned you went and took them . . . What have you done with them ?”

She got up from the bed, pulling herself together. What was the use of lamenting her fate ? Of course she wouldn’t go. Had she ever seriously hoped to ? Had she ever really hoped to become a dressmaker ?

“The least you can do is to tell me where you put them . . . There wasn’t half a pound left when I took the jar down just now.”

“You’re being horrid again.”

“I warn you ! If you won’t tell me where you put them . . .”

The old woman hung her head.

“Come on, answer now . . .”

There was a distant rumbling. The bus was coming back.

“Quick now ! I’ve still time to catch the bus.”

She snatched up the suitcase, forgetting she had neither dress nor shoes on.

“I . . .”

The old woman paused miserably.

“Give me a handkerchief . . . I . . . I ate them . . .”

The bus driver was a handsome young man with a dark moustache. He leant over his seat and peered into the shop.

“Any orders, Mademoiselle Valérie ?”

And already coming to the door, she answered, with a bitter little smile that seemed almost resigned :

“Only those cheeses you were going to fetch. Nothing else, thank you.”

FOUR RUPEES

RANGA WAS NEVER CERTAIN WHAT HE WAS GOING TO DO NEXT. HE set out of his little home in Kabir Lane, and by the time he turned the corner at Market Road, he always found some odd job coming his way. To-day a very peculiar task offered itself as he sat near the Market Fountain. A servant from a bungalow in the extension was going round with a searching look in his eyes. He explained "Our brass pot has fallen into the well. Do you know anyone who can get into the well and bring it out?"

"What will they pay for it?"

"You can say what you want."

"I must see the well first, and I can't think of anything less than two rupees," he said.

"Yes, follow me," the other said, and Ranga was astounded. He never thought that his offer would be accepted. He had never gone down a well before. He tried to excuse himself now. But the other would not let him go. He almost gripped him by the wrist and pulled him along. He went protesting. "I don't know anything about wells," he cried. "Oh, don't say all that; see the well first," said the servant and clung to him faster. He added, "They have made life a hell for me for four days now. They will dismiss me if I don't do anything about it to-day."

"But I know nothing about wells."

"Hush! None of it with me," admonished the old servant, and smiled significantly. "If you want an anna or two more ask for it; don't try these tricks."

"But, but," Ranga faltered but the other offered him a beedi and silenced him. Ranga followed him resigning himself to his fate.

At the extension bungalow they were at the gate: the master, his wife and two boys. At the sight of the servant they cried. "Have you found anyone?"

"Here he is," the servant said, pointing at Ranga. Ranga shuddered and looked about helplessly. The master said, "A brass vessel has fallen into the well. You must take it out."

"How can I, master?" replied Ranga. The servant interposed at this stage and added, "You leave it to me, master. He will do it." At this the master and the rest felt there was a deep diplomatic game being played here and merely said, "All right, all right, first see the well." They took him to the backyard. The master and the rest treated him with such consideration that he began to enjoy slowly the importance given to him. All of them surrounded him and explained how it happened. Ranga

listened to it all gravely and declared, "The rope must have been worn out." They received it with such a whoop of approval that Ranga began to feel he had made some pronouncement of profound significance. They then told him of the history of the vessel: how it was an heir-loom, given on the occasion of a great-grandfather's marriage and handed down from generation to generation. They looked severely at the old servant. The lady added, "This fool has always been warned not to touch that vessel and yet"

"Only zinc pots must be used for drawing water from a well," said Ranga like an expert speaking. A murmur of approbation went round. Ranga began to feel that he was an established 'Well-Man.'

They lifted the covering at the mouth of the well, and he peeped in. His heart sank. Far beyond a great tunnel of rugged darkness a patch of water gleamed. "Seems to be a very deep well," Ranga said.

"Only sixty feet."

"We don't usually go into wells deeper than forty," Ranga said.

"If you want eight annas or so more we won't grudge it," they said.

"You must pay me four rupees, otherwise I can't risk my life." After some haggling they agreed to this amount. Ranga's last hope of backing out now vanished. He had never earned four rupees in a lump, and this was attractive. He needn't seek any work for three days at least, and silence for once his wife and mother-in-law. This looked like a fortune coming his way. But a peer at that dark water neutralised all the attraction. Four rupees held, and he felt like running away. He said turning from the well, with the air of a man turning from a satisfactory preliminary inspection, "Yes, it is all right, I will come back in the evening. I have to go home now."

"Why?"

He was unable to explain. He murmured that he hadn't eaten his food yet. At which they dragged him to a passage in the bungalow, put up a leaf before him and served food. Before he knew where he was he had eaten a heavy dinner. They stood round him and encouraged him to eat more. They gave him betel leaves and arecanut and he chewed till his lips became blood-red. He felt that he was an honoured guest in that house. But the obligations involved in it tormented his mind. Now he felt that he was irrevocably committed to this expedition. They allowed him to rest for about half an hour and then summoned him to the well. He felt like a condemned man. He stood for a long time gazing into the bottom of the well. He made one final attempt to extricate himself: "I can't. I don't know" "Don't say so," they protested. Ranga felt puzzled why these people were so bent on seeing him drowned. He had a momentary impulse to dash away and escape. He glanced at those around him. They stood in a ring as if forming a cordon. He felt that if

he attempted to escape, they might pick him up bodily and put him into the well. There seemed to be no hope of escape. He took off his ragged shirt and tucked up his dhoti. He called for a rope, tied its end to the cross-bar of the well and let the other end down into the well. He climbed the parapet, slid down the rope, and stretched out his legs to reach the foothold cut into the side-wall. Thus he progressed downward. He dared not look down below him. The air became warm and dark. He looked up—a blue circle of sky, a peepul seedling growing out of a cleft in the cross-bar, and the hazy faces looking at him from the top. "Be careful," someone cried. "Why are you hesitating?" "Let me come up. I can't go down . . ." They cajoled him again and increased his remuneration by a few annas: "You are half way down already . . ."

"If I don't come up again, please tell my wife . . ." They burst into a laugh on hearing it. He felt so helpless that he said to himself: "There is no way out. Let me die." He briskly went down. It became darker and more eerie at every step. His ears grew dull and he felt a heaviness at his chest. His eyes dimmed and he was only partially conscious when he reached the last foothold. His brain kept drumming 'Four rupees, four rupees'. "I am dying," he kept saying to himself. "Or am I dead?" Ice-cold water lapped his feet. He bent down precariously and took up a handful of water and drank it. He then dived into the water muttering, 'Four rupees, four rupees'. His fingers combed the sandy bed and finally clutched a piece of rope. He dragged it up, and attached to it was the brass pot.

It was a greater adventure going up. They had nearly to haul him up. He lay prone on the ground for nearly an hour. When he woke up they said, "You are a good fellow. We will call you again if anything drops into the well. Where do you live?" He refused to say where he lived. "Give me my wages, let me go." They gave him four rupees and four annas. He looked at it and pleaded, "You promised me four rupees and twelve annas, master." They grew indignant on hearing it. "Is there no limit to your avarice? After all the vessel costs much less. We have given you food and everything. Go, go. Learn contentment . . ."

"You can never satisfy these 'well-men'. They are like this everywhere," someone added.

When Ranga went home his wife and mother-in-law were, as usual, at the door. On seeing him his wife snarled, "It is seven o'clock. When am I to buy the things and cook the food? You think I am born to slave. It will be a fine lesson if you are made to do without a meal to-night . . ." He flourished his four rupees and four annas. "Four rupees! Are you sure you didn't steal it?" He explained, showing the bruises on his elbows and knees. They just laughed and replied, "Never knew you to go near a well; more likely you have been in a scrape and pulled the money out of somebody's pocket."

OUTSIDE EDEN

A few lead in their harvests still
By the old wall and broken gate.
Far inland shines the radiant hill.
Inviolable the empty gate,
Impassible the gaping wall ;
And the mountain over all.
Such is the country of this clan,
Haunted by guilt and innocence.
There is a sweetness in the air
That bloomed as soon as time began,
But now is dying everywhere.
This people guard in reverence
Their proud and famous family tree
Sprung from a glorious king who once
Lived in such boundless liberty
As never a one among the great
Has known in all the kingdoms since ;
For death was barred from his estate.
Lost long ago, the histories say.
He and his consort lost it all.
Guiltiest and least guilty, they
In innocence discovered sin
Round a lost corner of the day,
And fell and fell through all the fall
That hurled them headlong over the wall.
Their children live where then they lay.

Guilt is next door to innocence.
So here this people choose to live
And never think to travel hence,
Nor learn to be inquisitive,
Nor browse in sin's great library,
The single never-ending book
That fills the shelves of all the earth.
There the learned enquirers look
And blind themselves to see their face.
But these live in the land of birth
And count all else a worthless grace.

The simple have long memories.
Memory makes simple all that is.
So these the lawless world can love
At ease, the thickets running wild,
The thorny waste, the flourishing grove.
Their knotted landscape, wrong and clear
As the crude drawings of a child,
Is to them become more dear
Than geometrical symmetry.
Their griefs are all in memory grown
As natural as a weathered stone.
Their troubles are a tribute given
Freely, gazing at the hill.
Such is their simplicity,
Standing on earth, looking on heaven.

ANDRÉ MAUROIS

MOMENTS OF DISRUPTION

(Translated from the French by Terence Smith)

HAVE THERE NOT BEEN, IN THE HISTORY OF CIVILIZATION, AND particularly in that of literature, certain moments when events impose a break with tradition, a revolution in modes of expression and in ideas? A cursory examination would seem to prove it. Such a moment of disruption would be the ceding of the pseudo-Classical to the Romantic drama which took place in France over one hundred years ago. Or again, after 1945, the passage of the novel of psychological analysis to the metaphysical novel and the American novel of action.

Two main causes underlie these sudden changes. The first is simply, that unless new sources are found the type wears out. What was at first the spontaneous movement of an artist, a demand of his temperament, becomes in time an imitation. All art presupposes an emotion, dominated by form; where there is no passion, there is no art. An academic architect may, without having the belief of the Middle Ages, "build in Gothic." But it will never be anything but fake Gothic.

Second Cause: inventions transform habits by which type of work is determined. The invention of writing, and then of printing, dealt a blow to the prestige of the spoken word. The epic, it is true, did not disappear completely, nor the ballad, but prose was born, and very quickly became more and more important. Reversing the process, the radio and the gramophone to-day undermine the position of the book, and more than one writer sets out—often unconsciously—to study the technique of the spoken word, designed for a listener rather than a reader. Disruption.

The novel of psychological analysis, from Madame de la Fayette to Marcel Proust was written for persons of a cultured class who had the leisure to "delabirinthes des sentiments." Besides, part of the French tradition, handed down by Racine, Marivaux, Stendhal, Balzac and the Moralists, was an interest in the examination and analysis of human passions. In the United States, where this tradition is lacking, and where such leisured and cultured folk are rare, the novel of action was alone capable of interesting an extensive public. Nowadays, in France itself, the masses are more willing to read *Annapurna* or *le Grand Cirque* than *l'Education Sentimentale*. Disruption.

It is important to remember, however, that these cleavages may not be, and are not, in fact, complete. Tradition appears to be interrupted. It goes underground, and for some years, or

even for some decades, it no longer flows except in deep caverns, ill explored. But one day, in an unexpected spot, it emerges again from its hiding place. Who would have thought, twenty years ago, that the tradition of Stendhal, Gobineau, Villiers de l'Isle Adam would again see the light in a work by Jean Giono? And yet *le Moulin de Pologne* recalls us to the *Contes Cruels*. Louise de Vilmorin has not "imitated" the Princesse de Clèves: she has simply rediscovered the pace of the French story as it existed in a great age.

No artist comes out of a void; none invents his entire technique. Victor Hugo was aware of his immense debt to Virgil, Lucian, Horace, Juvenal and Tacitus. The master of the Romantics was a great Classicist, and well he knew it. Those same artists who seek, deliberately, to free themselves from tradition, return, consciously or not, to a tradition further back. They wish to be Primitives, but are Primitives at second hand, who know—and study—the authentic Primitives. The traditions of archaic Greece, of Egypt, of Negro sculpture are reincarnated in the works of many modern artists. "One is always somebody's child," said Brid'oison. That is quite as true of works of art as of human beings.

How comes it then, this impression given us by certain artists of a complete break with tradition? The reason, quite simply, is this: that instead of hooking themselves to their immediate predecessors, they have sought their models at a distance—in space or in time. They, like all of us, continue and reanimate a tradition. However, it is not the tradition with which their contemporaries are best acquainted. Proust, certainly, has his literary ancestors, not Balzac, not Bourget, but Saint-Simon, Ruskin, Thomas Hardy, George Eliot. The average French reader who knows little of these writers, who may, perhaps, never have read them, is, therefore, under the illusion that that wonderful monster, *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, was born of a spontaneous act of generation. Neither is Valéry an orphan. It is simply that he is not in the prose tradition of Anatole France or Renan, but of Descartes and Bossuet. Nothing seems so ancient as the recent past, while the distant past astonishes by its novelty.

Moments of disruption are often those when a literature, instead of borrowing its essential elements from the national tradition, allows itself to become fertilised by some grain of pollen, wafted from afar. Crossings are as necessary to literature as to breeding if degeneration of the species is to be avoided. Voltaire, his wit quickened by the *Thousand and One Nights* of Galland, produced the most delicious of his works in *Candide*. The campaigns of Napoleon opened up new ground to Stendhal, when, transplanted to Italy, his work was enriched by a happy blending with the chronicles of that country. Fenimore Cooper and Walter Scott revealed Balzac to Balzac. Byron's *Don Juan* gives us the *Namouna* of Musset.

No artist can detach himself from all tradition. "Only the

thinkers provide food for thought," says Alain. One learns to paint by copying the masters. One learns to write by reading the masterpieces. But these are not always the same masters, nor the same masterpieces. Moments of disruption are those where the painter ceases to copy Raphael in order to study the Byzantine mosaics, or where Claudel goes to *The Apocalypse* for his inspiration. Yet in these moments themselves a certain technical tradition remains. In a book on the meaning of *speech*, a philosopher* imagines the humanity of tomorrow no longer learning to read or to write, since the amplifier will be all-sufficient for the conveyance of the word and for its proper understanding. "The civilization founded on the book will give way to a civilization of image and of sound." Perhaps, but the fundamentals of all art will survive as they survived when the novel replaced the epic, and if new arts are born, the artists of the past will certainly direct their course. *Per saecula saeculorum.*

*Gustave Gusdorf: *La Parole* (Presses Universitaires Francaises).

ANDRÉ MAUROIS

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JONATHAN CAPE

THE DEATH OF THE NOVEL

AS SOON AS THE FILM INDUSTRY SHOWED SIGNS OF EMERGING FROM its primitive innocence and imbecility, an anxious voice or two was heard grieving that it would be the death of the novel. Nothing of the kind happened, the appetite for written fiction persisted on all levels, from the glossier magazines to James Joyce. The actual effect on the novelist of the competition of the films, when these began to deviate into intelligence, was quite different, and did not show itself at all plainly before the twenties. The developing technique of the film suggested that a great many things the novelist had always taken to be essential for his readers' comfort and comprehension, lengthy descriptions of scene and character, carefully-built bridges between one scene and the next, were not essential at all; the reader could happily do without them. The lesson, quickly learned by the popular novelist, raised the technical level of the average novel in an amazing way; the novel had reached its machine age; competence, neatness, agility, came, it seemed, of themselves, to bless the growing writer. This technical revolution would have come about even if Hollywood had never bought a novel to turn into a film. The hope of catching Hollywood's eye with a well-tailored plot came in, I am rather sure, as an additional incentive.

On balance, then, the films did the novelist no obvious harm. Without them, Graham Greene might have written at the length of Dostoevsky; it is not very likely, and might not have suited him. But television is a new and subtler threat. More than one serious critic has announced, not without *schadenfreude*, that this time it really is the end. It is hard to believe that an impulse as old as the first sagas dies so easily. But scepticism may be only the involuntary refusal of a writer born and bred in a dying culture to realise that he is mortally sick, and it would be foolish not to look narrowly at the threat. It is true and obvious that a family into which a television set has been introduced is likely to read, if at all, for information or instruction rather than for pleasure—to give pleasure being the novelist's essential purpose. It takes its pleasures sitting in a darkened room, staring in a hypnotised way at a screen which flickers like an old-fashioned film, and demands, with rare exceptions, a pretty low level of mental effort—not any lower, it is true, than that demanded by the glossy fiction of Mr. X and Miss Y, but offered without the trouble of turning a page, and without needing even the slight degree of concentration required to reach the

end of a sentence containing two relative clauses. In short, the comic strips and news columns come to life. Surely, the neglected novelist thinks, they will tire of this in time? But will they? Why? Or, with more presumption, he thinks: There will always be a minority to enjoy the sensations offered by literature. But I suppose there is no reason why time should not bring in a Third Programme of television designed to net the stubborn highbrow—and that only salvation of the serious novelist, the aspiring middlebrow, who used to read and try to profit by the novels praised as serious or experimental or, God save us all, socially significant. And what will the new Henry James do then, poor thing? Put his head under his wing, or take a course in writing for television?

We have not reached this point, and the undeniably critical situation of the writer today is usually approached as a purely economic problem. But if by a technical miracle the seven-and-sixpenny novel were given back to us, should we then see book-shops full of eager buyers? I doubt it. The enemy will go on infiltrating house after house, and hours that adults and children alike might have spent reading will be sacrificed to the trance in the darkened room. The temptation to the young writer—and to the more agile among the old—to turn over to the new thing is already great. It is not only that very naturally he feels he had better get in on the ground floor. There is also the itch to try a new trick. It takes a long time to write a novel, months of solitary confinement. Writing for television offers quicker excitements, and a challenge—Am I clever enough? In exactly the same way it is not only the wish to earn enormous sums of money for the tax-collector which tempts intelligent novelists to write their novels in a sort of film technique. It is also, probably it is even more, the wish to bring off a new sort of brilliance and sharpness—the sort of brilliance, very much an affair of lighting and angle-shots, which Graham Greene achieves. Only an eccentric or a dandy prefers to drive a barouche rather than a car.

Moreover it seems perfectly feasible and sensible to decide: I will continue to write novels in the way I think they should be written, as Henry James wrote, with no concessions to readers debauched by Hollywood and TV, and I will earn my living by writing dialogue for films or on the staff of a television service. If Aldous Huxley can do it, surely I can? This indeed is what a young writer said to me a few days ago. He had been brought up so expensively and progressively that when I warned him, *Ye cannot serve God and Mammon*, he imagined I was quoting from Auden, and was not impressed. I ought to have said: The novel is already in danger of partition, and if every intelligent young writer follows your example and decides to earn his living by one form of writing while satisfying his conscience and assuaging his boredom by writing on another level in his spare

time, the split will widen into a hideous gap, on one side of it commercial novels, written with the conscious intention of attracting Hollywood or of startling the semi-literate of all income groups into doing a little bawdy reading; on the other, a crop of mortally obscure no-mercy-on-the-common-reader novels, imitations of Kafka, anaemic reflections of Henry James and the rest of it, with few to read and fewer still to publish them. Ageing critics will continue to write defiantly of the novel as an art form. Encouraged by them, the thing itself will live a brief shadowy after-life, for a little time longer squeaking and flittering in dusty corners. The death of the serious novel, so long expected, will have taken place.

Is there no hope? Of course there is. But not, not, in trying still harder to compete with the inventious of our devilish ingenuity. There is absolutely no hope in a me-too policy, no hope in crying: We can do all the films can do—think of Graham Greene. There are many things that the film—and, in time, television—can do infinitely better than the novel, in the way of vivid scene-setting, sudden breath-taking contrasts, and effective, if crude, symbolism. It is merely silly for the novelist to try to compete here, sacrificing his own peculiar triumphs and opportunities.

In short, if the serious novel has a future, it has one only on condition of turning its back sharply on its present nervous and unhealthy attraction towards the films, of using unashamedly methods the screen cannot touch, and at a depth, with a complexity, it can never reach. This is not an indirect way of saying that we ought to strive to write like Henry James. One of the wasting diseases the novel is suffering from is traceable to an over-injection of Henry James. Certainly he is not to be held responsible either for the heretical doctrine that, to be taken seriously as a work of art, a novel must conform to agreed principles of composition—even though conformity exclude “such large loose baggy monsters” as *War and Peace* from the canon, whilst admitting to it such exercises in aesthetic nihilism, linguistic hecatombs, as *Finnegans Wake*—or for the old-maidish gentility, the rather simpering elegance, which is the most common virtue of the English novel at this time. In reality, there is no such thing as an ideal form for the novel. Its boundaries must be vague enough to make room for works as carefully composed as *The Ambassadors*, as lyrical as a *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, as elaborately arranged in brilliant set-pieces as *L'Education sentimentale*, and as baggy as *War and Peace*.

The novel cannot survive as a Byzantine exercise in pure literature. Nor can it survive by hurrying to meet its most dangerous rivals on ground where they will always be able to go one better. Its only viable future lies in exaggerating the differences between film and novel, in pushing further the virtues of the great novelists, the relentless heart-searchings of a Dostoevsky or a D.H.

Lawrence, pursued even when they lead into frightening or disreputable places ; the heroically patient re-creation of a society, starting from the interior of the interior life itself, of a Proust ; the immense gusto and curiosity of a Tolstoy, a Balzac ; the passion of a Stendhal. This does not mean that we must imitate any one of these masters. God forbid and defend us from any such servility and folly. It does mean that the novelist must risk everything, risk losing his figure, boring critics cursed with more intellect than intelligence, boring or shocking even his well-wishers, in order to do all the things which neither film nor television, mass media, can do with any subtlety, sharpen our vision of the world we are living in (a world, now, of cold violence, of doctrinal murder, of the defeat of a great revolt), increase our knowledge of human nature, lower a little the barriers separating us from one another, extend and deepen our powers of sympathy. And, if possible, he must do these things without putting on a mask of tragedy ; he must try to be as passionate and detached as Albert Camus in *La Peste*, as harsh and gay as Silone's *Fontamara* and *Bread and Wine*, as tense and smilingly ironical as Malraux's *Lutte avec l'ange*.

The pleasure the novel gives us, or can give us, is not the pleasure of escaping from a harrassed world. It is none the less, as is all art, a form of escape or revolt, revolt against the incomplete and unsatisfying nature of human life, its profound injustice, its transience, its limitations and disunity ; a revolt, too, from the torment of our solitary state. The artist does not deny reality, he draws back from it in order to transfigure it. He does not deny that suffering, injustice, and death, are an inalienable part of life, but he triumphs when, with a never secure serenity, and without blasphemy, he revolts against them. Since life, so far as we can see, merely runs on, it lacks style : the novel, shaping this always incoherent stuff into a whole, gives it the style it lacks. Gives us, too, the exquisite happiness of entering into complete communication with another human being : we know Anna Karenina as we know no living man or woman whom we love or who loves us. In the work of the great novelists we experience a life which has all the qualities of coherence, lucidity, achievement we are cheated of in our individual lives, eaten away as these are, moment after moment, by the trivialities of existence. In living, part of our tragedy is that we survive our greatest experiences. But we do not in that way survive Stavrogin, Julien Sorel, Charlus. They abide our question, they are delivered to us in their totality. And this totality, this immense clear complexity of the great characters of fiction, this permanence, is denied to the characters of film and television, and denied, too, to the characters even of an intelligent novelist who adopts the technique of the film.

What I look forward to, then, is not the death of the novel. I do, though, expect and rather hope for the death of the professional novelist. Since I have followed the trade too long now to learn another, I must hope it will last my time, but I consider

it, as a profession, undesirable. Or at least, I would say that the disappearance of the professional novelist will not be an unmitigated disaster. The animal writes too many novels. It would be better if, like Stendhal, he spent more time living them. It is true that Stendhal—the only perfect novelist—wrote too few novels for his devotees. I would myself give the total output of novels written in English during the past twenty or thirty years to learn that the third part of *Lucien Leuwen* had in fact been written and so might turn up. (Alas, there is no hope.) But how infinitely preferable to have written too few novels, and among them the *Chartreuse de Parme*, than to have turned out once a year another talented intelligent interesting unnecessary book. And how tempting to hope that, in future, novels will be written only by vice-consuls—or mathematicians or civil servants or chefs—writing in their leisure hours.

But let it be said at once that the profession by which our new Stendhal earns his bread must be one unconnected with writing. It must not be concerned with any of the bastard forms of literature—with writing dialogue for films or grooming plays for television. That sort of thing only wearies, exasperates and befogs the writing mind. A novelist, like André Malraux, who is involved as an actor in the violent passions of our age, writes, as did Stendhal, too few novels. But when they come how good they are.

Walter Macken

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LION FEUCHTWANGER

NOTES ON THE HISTORICAL NOVEL

FREQUENTLY, CONSCIENTIOUS READERS WRITE TO ME TO INQUIRE whether one or the other detail in my historical novel is "correct." Usually it isn't, and that is what I tell the curious ones.

I am not in the least ashamed of those lies. I think of Mark Twain, who gave the young Rudyard Kipling the following advice: "Young man, first get your facts, then distort them as you please."

In thus preferring lies that help build up illusion to truths that disturb it, I can quote some illustrious examples. Homer, the authors of the Bible, Shakespeare, and all writers of great historical fiction, down to our own time—they all took quite astonishing liberties with the documented historical facts.

Why did those poets lie? It wasn't that they were too lazy to find out the "exact truth." In many cases it can be quite conclusively established that they were very well aware of this "exact truth." But evidently they had no intention of competing with the reporters of documented facts—that type of work did not concern them. Aristotle, who reflected on this attitude of the poets, came to the following conclusion: "The artistic representation of history is a more serious pursuit than the exact writing of history. For the art of letters goes to the heart of things, whereas the factual report merely collocates details."

The writers of great historical novels made use of history merely to express their own concept of the world. They attempted to "distinguish what was accidental and transitory in the nature of historical characters from what was essential and immutable." The latter they tried to preserve, while they altered the former at will. What they wanted to take over from the past was the fire, not the ashes. The past, to them, was the foundation of the present. They wanted to create something alive, to beget life itself.

Their success proves them right. Their books, their invented legends, epics, dramas, and novels; their imaginary men and deeds, have proved more alive than all the proved and painstakingly established facts of historical science. The imaginary Odysseus is more alive than any historical chieftain or sea captain of any actual Greek island. The imaginary Haman from the short story called *The Book of Esther* is more alive than his historical model, the very real King Antiochus. And of all the heroes of history who ever fought for liberty, there is none so alive as the completely imaginary Swiss, William Tell. A fine legend or historical novel is usually more credible, truer, more alive, and more vital than any clear, exact representation of historical facts.

One thing the serious writer of historical novels and the serious student of history have in common: both see history as the struggle of a tiny, enlightened, and responsible minority against the vast, compact majority of the blind and irresponsible, who are guided merely by instinct.

To depict earlier episodes of this eternal struggle is the purpose of textbooks of history as well as historical fiction. But the poet is superior to the scientist. He can turn the bitterness of past defeat, the elation of past victories, into present-day experiences. And thus he forges arms to speed up the final victory of reason over stupidity and the eternal yesterday.

From the theoretical works on the historical novel written by such learned authors as Nield, Sheppard, and others, it follows that approximately 25,000 historical novels have been published in the course of the last 100 years. The vast majority of these works—my estimate is 24,930—endeavour to relate historical facts just as brightly and excitingly as possible. (The best known example of this type is *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas.) If the ambition of the authors of this kind of novel is high, they try to concoct out of the features of a historical figure a thing that has some resemblance to a human being.

Of the 24,930 works mentioned, about 2,000 were temporarily successful, while about 300 continued popular over a longer period. They achieved their success just by the use of suspense and colour, in some cases by adding a touch of patriotism, of feeling for blood and soil.

During those same 100 years, also about 70 historical novels were written which were meant to serve a higher purpose: to give meaning to history; to present contemporary ideas and feelings more sharply and more clearly by moving them into the distance, into the past; to give the reader a clear, concise picture of the author's own view of the world. The greatest example of this type is Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. To be exact, I have come across only 63 such novels, but I may have missed about 7. Of these 63 or 70 works, 9 were successful. These 9 novels of the second, serious variety owed their success to the fact that the readers believed them to be examples of the colourful kind.

As for myself, I have been endeavouring to write historical novels for 27 years. Within that time I have managed to complete 7 such books. I am now going to give away a secret: My intention was to produce serious art. Nevertheless, one of my 7 novels undoubtedly belongs to the common type of historical novel. Consequently it is always being highly praised, held up as a shining example in most textbooks. To finish this entertaining work, including research, required 7 months. The other 6 works, as has been shown, took me something more than 26 years. Fortunately, the public mistook these 6 novels, too, for examples of the first, common type; and therefore, all in all, these historical novels of mine have also been fairly successful.

BOOK REVIEWS

DARLING TOM, AND OTHER STORIES by L. A. G. Strong. Methuen. 10/6.

FREEBOOTERS by Maurice Kennedy. Dolmen Press, Dublin. 6/-.

In an illuminating foreword to this, his latest collection of short stories, Mr. Strong makes a plea, surely overdue, for pleasure in writing. "Not enough high-level writers let themselves be amused, and so amuse their readers," he says. "I believe that such a story as—for instance, *The Wasp's Nest* (in this volume) is just as well worth the trouble taken over it as any other I have written, and I do not bring a lower standard of care to the writing of it."

These words have point indeed when, as in the present volume, the writer is found to have as able a mastery of the "unattractive" and "unpopular" kind of story as of the "attractive" and "popular." Quotes are inevitable in discussing the work of a writer, who, in his quiet, way, revolutionizes *genre*. Is The Major's Man a "popular" tale? It is a winner on any level. And so one is tempted to say that Mr. Strong is never better—or more serious than when he allows Mr. Mangan, the narrator in that entertaining series of tales, to take the stage. Here the subjects are as fresh as paint, and the writer's treatment of them that of a first-class painter: it is a kind of stippling really by which in such stories as *Ducks From Darragh* or *The Toreador* he achieves a most delicate blend of funniness and, as it were, Shakespearean sentiment—"We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow." None of them is merely funny—they all have their human truth—but *Darling Tom*, which tells of the finding of a letter

on a body cast up by the tide, is hauntingly beautiful in atmosphere and feeling. One might imagine that Mr. Strong, in turning away from the funny, the odd, the picturesque or the poetic, would give us a good story certainly, but one somehow out of his element. The truth is he is quite as at home in seemingly unattractive subjects. *I've Done It Now*, a drama, *pianissimo*, of love and disenchantment, played against the unencouraging setting of a canteen, is a first-class story. And *The Old Man*, which points to the loneliness of extreme old age, owes how much of its effect to the unerring manner in which the suburban limitations of the old man's background are depicted. In *That's Life*, however, where degradation abounds, Mr. Strong is too mature a writer to be merely grim: here the quenchless spark of humour, of insouciance in human behaviour, saves all. Like life, this writer, so wholly respectable—to use a good word in its good sense, defies classification.

There is more than a touch of poetry and "panache" in Mr. Maurice Kennedy's short-story, which tells of the descent of a party of tinkers on a prosperous countryside. But how real these vagrants are! This writer has an instant and tranquil gift of mirroring things, poses, moods of nature as one feels them really to be. It is partly, no doubt, an exceptional power of observation which enables him to give so unblurred—almost filmlike—a picture, but it is also, more preciously, an appetite for the picture as it is—behind the usual grime of non-seeing, preconception, etc. This little book is very attractively brought out in an addition consisting of 225 signed copies on Irish vellum. The pictures cut by Michael Morrow have tang and distinction.

T.S.

FORREST REID, by Russell Burlingham.
Faber.

25/-.

I should like to recommend this study as an introduction to the work of Forrest Reid. Its author, Mr. Russell Burlingham, has not had an easy task, but he has performed it creditably: as Mr. Walter de la Mare writes in his introduction: 'Every page of it is clearly the outcome of a most scrupulous care'. So I hope it will find many readers, because its subject is a writer well worth reading, and Mr. Burlingham is a most sympathetic critic. Forrest Reid is still, of course, a 'minority' writer, as he was during his lifetime, but although his work will perhaps never be extremely popular, this book should bring him a wider circle of readers.

What kind of a writer was Forrest Reid? First of all, he was one who chose extremely personal, original subjects, who wrote beautifully, and who was a devoted craftsman in prose, with a high regard for the novelist's art. (He was, incidentally, probably the greatest authority on Henry James during the lifetime of the 'Master'.)

Though Mr. Burlingham's study shows great understanding of its subject, it is not, by any means, definitive: for other things remain to be said about the man and other evaluations to be made of his achievement. By far the most satisfactory part of this book is the analysis of the novels. I am glad Mr. Burlingham places *Brian Westby* so highly: a novel beautiful in its planning and execution, and written with wonderful precision and assurance. Along with *Apostate* and *Peter Waring* it is, in my opinion, the high-water-mark of Forrest Reid's work.

Mr. Burlingham examines five of the tales in considerable detail, in order to indicate the course of his author's development. I think he would have been better advised to proceed chronologically, and to have considered the books as they appeared. I am well aware, of course, that the development was by no means straightforward; there were occasional lapses, of which *The Gentle Lover* was one. It is certainly outside the canon, and I remember that Forrest Reid himself

thought so. It is pastiche minor James, and is outside the range of the disciple.

Mr. Burlingham is unfortunate in that he had not the privilege of knowing Forrest Reid: and though he builds up, by means of private letters and quotations from *Apostate* and *Private Road* a portrait of his subject, it never becomes really alive. For instance, it is not enough to say that 'he could be "difficult"—desperately difficult'. He could be, of course: but in what ways? This kind of statement, by itself, is not illuminating. More candour is required if a true portrait is to be given.

John Boyd

A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN, a Play by Eugene O'Neill.
Cape 10/6.

Some unusual circumstances surround the publication of Eugene O'Neill's latest play. It has never been presented on the New York stage nor are there outstanding rights or plans for its production. "Since I cannot presently give it the attention required for appropriate presentation," says the author, "I have decided to make it available in book form." Whatever the reason for such cold-shouldering, this play is certainly the work of a master.

Its main characters—they make a sort of father-daughter-lover triangle as in *Anna Christie*—are a physically oversized heroine, Josie Hogan, "almost a freak," her father, a Connecticut tenant farmer, of Irish extraction, and a middle-aged but debonair and despairing dipsomaniac, to whom Josie (whose pride it is to appear a whore) plays the part of the Eternal Feminine in saving his soul, or at least in freeing him from the "heebie jeebies."

Vieux jeux? No description can give an adequate notion of the tragic, moving and tender quality of this play, in which the moon—a moon of inspiration, love, dreams, confessions—throws her spell as powerfully as in the second act of *Tristan und Isolde*. It is a most unusual play, to say the least—the work of a tragic poet (not in words, but in feelings) and a stern moralist.

T.S.

**DIALANN OILTRIGH, by
Donchadh O'Céileachair.
Sairséal agus Dill. 9/6.**

It may seem ungracious, to say the least, to review in English a book so compact of well written, idiomatic Irish as this first full-length volume from Denis Kelleher. The author comes from Coolen not so far from the birthplace of Canon Peter O'Leary, An t-Athair Peadar, and one cannot help reflecting how far modern Irish literature has travelled on the road to sophistication when one compares the present book with *Seadna* for example.

I have a feeling that the genial Canon would have enjoyed this book. It is a pleasant, unaffected record of a pilgrim's experiences on the journey to Rome in the mid-autumn of Holy Year. The author in the course of his pilgrimage met many interesting characters whom he has sketched with quiet humour untinged by caricature.

The book belongs to a genre which has perhaps been over-developed in English, but is comparatively new to Gaelic readers. Some of his comments have a realism refreshing to those who are familiar with orthodox pious literature. It will be interesting to note what the reaction of the Gaelic Athletic Association will be to his suggestion that "Faith of Our Fathers" may be conveniently memorised in Croke Park.

The book is excellently printed and bound. As well as providing entertainment for the general reader it is intended for use in secondary schools. The author is no mean linguist and his knowledge of English literature ranges from Chaucer to P. G. Wodehouse. In these days of inflated prices the book is a genuine bargain.

Tim O'Donoghue

**PURITY OF DICTION IN
ENGLISH VERSE, by Donald
Davie. Chatto & Windus. 14/-.**

Taking his point of departure in 18th century poets like Johnson, Cowper and Collins, Mr. Davie proceeds to develop a three-branched thesis: that these poets are ad-

mirable for qualities more frequently condemned than admired; that purity of diction has produced them; that the virtues of a pure diction could with profit be appropriated by modern poets.

Diction signifies a selective use of language; pure diction is described in a phrase borrowed from T. S. Eliot, "the perfection of a common language," and is characterised by urbanity and chastity: "the tone of the centre," according to Matthew Arnold. In a series of arguments which seem to say little more than St. Augustine intended when he prescribed clarity as one of the three constituent virtues of art, we are returned to Mr. Eliot's "to have the virtues of good prose is the first and minimum requirement of great poetry." The 18th century achieved this by a few literary devices designed to enliven dead metaphors, renovate old, with a resulting subtlety, economy in metaphor overlooked in our own time; indeed disparaged. These pages are Mr. Davie's best.

In the second part of his book he applies his conclusions to the poetry and criticism of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Hopkins and Landor. But their value is illustrative; his heart is elsewhere.

Praising Coleridge's poem "Dejection," Mr. Davie discloses, I think, the error prompting him unduly to champion a mannered, moralistic verse and to propose a criterion which is not neglected by the moderns merely because they have not sought its exemplar in the 18th century. He writes: "the voice which speaks it (the poem) is impersonal and timeless, the voice of a language, the voice of Man, of no one and everyone." Now if there is one thing damnable about the 18th century it is its hollow voice of anonymity which leads to the blind moral complacency of the 19th, to the immoral anarchy of the 20th. For love and hate we must have persons, men and women, not the capitalised abstraction Man with a voice and a conscience belonging to no one. The authentic voice, the clear, audible voice, comes from a person, not from the herd. The creative source of poetry, like all creation, is personal.

Robert Ostermann

Poetry Ireland 21

EDITED BY DAVID MARCUS

PATRICK GALVIN

The White Monument

NICK NICHOLLS

Grammatical Error

ART O'BRIEN

Irish Sea

EDWARD McCARTHY

The Fisherman

JAMES O'ROURKE

Two Poems

PATRICK GALVIN

The White Monument

Look you : Do not despise him
 For you are strangers here and do not know
 You do not know how beautiful he was
 How great was his battle-power.
 You come with your new books
 And little silver pencils
 But you do not know how tall he was.

Now he is dead !
 The Great Bull of the city is dead.
 The Civic Guards come down from Barrack Street
 With iodine on their lips
 And black ink on their fingers.
 They stand like old warriors
 Before the white monument.

The crowd gathers in the Mall
 And the little girls tremble
 The Trinity bell breaks out
 And then there is silence.
 Even the boys have stopped singing
 For no one can believe
 The Great Bull is dead.

The seagulls come up the river
 And settle on the monument.
 The old men at the Fountain
 Fold their papers and whisper
 Of the rich blood of the bull.
 Now the dockers come up from the Quay
 To gaze at the beautiful body

Lying on the Mall
 There with the green sword in his mouth
 On that black tar since night
 In the crying whirlpool of blood
 Since soft terrible night—
 Look you : it was the Earth breaking
 And the stars falling upon us.

All the Civic Guards are wondering
 All the people are wondering
 Many of them have fierce looks.
 The pencils cut through the black books
 And the seagulls watch from the monument
 Wondering who stabbed
 Wondering who dared with a green sword.

Who killed him cried the monument ?
 Who cut him cried the stone figures ?
 Who dragged at the long wound
 Opened the soft mouth
 To anoint
 To embalm with sour death ?
 And the old men at the Fountain
 Dropped their papers and wept.

The tall girls trembled
 The women brought heaps of flowers
 Garlands of burning nettles
 To lay at the feet at the bright head
 To cover the pouring wound
 To seal the starved eyes
 Of the murdered bull.

Who stabbed the Great Bull in the mouth ?
 Who killed the Great Pride ?
 If not names then reasons
 We are all wondering
 We don't know
 It is time we did know
 Who rose in the cruel night and killed.

Now all the bells rang
 And the Shandon timed the ringing.
 The dockers pulled down the flags
 And covered the face of the bull
 The seagulls rested on the body
 The children tugged at the green sword
 And broke the long blade to pieces.

The Naked Man was torn and bled
 And he walked over the body of the bull
 Whispering : who killed killed the Great Power ?
 The Civic Guards looked at the stone figures
 And the white monument cursed.
 Who killed killed the Great Power ?
 And the blood flashed in the sunlight.

Ah ! here was a death.
 The great death, the cruel death.
 The proud bull of the city upon the Mall
 Covered with flags and flowers
 And burning burning nettles.
 And no one knows who killed him—
 O we are wondering.

ii

In the evening we buried him
 We raised him on our shoulders
 And walked with him to Douglas.
 All the windows draped in seaweed
 And the streets filled with iron ghosts
 The blood grew hard upon the pavement
 And we buried him.

We crossed the bridges and the Quays
 And the children carried flowers.
 We passed the Deadhouse and the Union Gate
 And the people wept for him.
 The Civic Guards wore black hats
 And the soldiers wore suits of green.
 There under the tall tree we buried him.

You do not know how we felt
 It is too great to imagine,
 But there was never such a death as this
 Never such a lament.
 It was the blood shooting from the wounds
 A cistern of fires.
 It was the most killing of all deaths
 And we could not believe it.

The Civic Guards marched past
 And they would not believe it.
 The wound was plain to see
 But we would not see it.
 We covered his face with earth and ferns
 And saw that the blood was gone.
 Still we would not believe it.

When the voice of God told us
 We did not listen.
 When the red wind shrieked at us
 We did not hear it.
 We dragged his body from the grave
 And saw how he was dead—
 But we did not believe in death.

Then when it was over we asked ourselves :
 Who would do such a thing ?
 Who would take the Great Pride
 And murder him with a sword ?
 We questioned the Civic Guards and the soldiers
 And we questioned ourselves,
 But no one knew who killed us with a death.

iii

Now upon this old night
 We knelt upon a rock of leaves
 And stared forever at the hungry hills.
 The coloured lamps upon the wall
 Threw daggers at the face of God
 Melting the little caves of ice
 From his two eyes.

Was it ourselves alone
 Who broke the night with moving
 Was it ourselves alone
 Who silenced the stone figures
 Was it ourselves alone
 Destroyed the outraged centuries
 Killing the Great Pride with our consent ?

The weeds grow over the great bull
 And children walk the Douglas Road.
 The Naked Man whispers to the night :
 It was ourselves alone
 Who stabbed him with a green sword
 Stabbed him in the mouth in the night
 And we did not know.

Grammatical Error

What are the different parts of speech
Depicting the tongue in its search for joy ?
Or the parts of the body out of reach
The mind imagines, the hands employ ?

Here are the stupid, here the astute ;
Here are the mute recurring flowers ;
Here are the people who followed suit ;
Here is a list of the heavenly powers.

Blind syntax and blind sinew blend,
Black as the hours of the hedge unfold
The shape of the belly about to distend,
The treasures of learning grown hot and grown cold.

Irish Sea

Here is no fog of words to blur
The shock-flung crystal. Here
The sea, direct line through to timeless
Dignity of passion, brother
With the reckless wind, hurls
Acid challenge to the heart,
Cuts through the townsman's necessary
Armour. In this clear intimacy
No longer is there need to think
In terms of subtle self-protection,
No need for exploration by
Old thing said new.
In the terrible palm of an old god
There is only oneself
And love for kind people
And the savage, cleansing hatred of those who are mean.

EDWARD McCARTHY

The Fisherman

Old, old, old,
 With parchment face,
 Owns only age and ember-grace ;
 Ember from flame of gold,
 Perhaps—let who will trace,
 None knows his yellow days.

Who, who knows ?
 The wet sand knows
 His broken sandal,
 Who knows ? None knows,
 O crooked candle,
 Candle on the sea,
 What wax you shed on sea-surge silently,
 None knows your yellow days.

His old skin cracks
 Old man, old broken candle, sees
 Bright lights of yellow days ;
 He weeps ? He curses heaven ? Prays ?
 None knows his yellow days.

No. No. No.
 None knows : no one *can* know,
 He is sea's candle, time's old scarecrow,
 He flings his light upon the waves,
 And puts to silence the gull-loud skies,
 We will not ask ; we will not trace ;
 We do not want to know his yellow days.

JAMES O'ROURKE

The Way Of Youth

Time is the desert we must cross, and youth the camel
 we now ride ; manhood will ride upon a horse.
 If it is so, here is a question I would ask :
 the oasis is heaven of the sands, then why do we wander
 all the time ? Our diaries are written by our feet.
 Is it not so ? Here is another query too :
 Is there something we must seek or do, or have we
 nought to do but ride ? The camels are silent as we go.

Killeshin was the guardian of our youth ;
the farmer of the heavens drove his plough
around our homes and made that mammoth drill.
And do you, Colum, remember the happiness ?
Our days were all a pantomime of laughs and smiles
and minutes clowned their moments into hours and days.
The zephyr has recorded all our moods,
there is a pleasant sadness when it plays them back.

Yes, I have known the sky to weep at such remembering ;
those days were spent in paradox, for we were bound
by friendship's chain and thought the fetters freedom.
If we were girls a kiss and hug would link
our broken chain, but a young man's hand
is far too cold to hold the heat of love,
its liquid lies more gently on the sponge of lips.

But we must not be foolish now as wise young men,
we shall not profit much lamenting
on our carefree days, our lightspent days.
The stone from boyhood's catapult has sung behind
the bird of childhood flying from our valley—
and we have grown taller than our guardian's hills.
Let us close the light written chapter then,
and set our pens more deeply in more noble lines—
and one thing more—
let us go and thank the Farmer for our hidden youth.

Hands

I have the pianist's fingers
but have not chorded the keys ;
sighing the talent servants' pleas
for these untried tips, I am pocketed
in the dead strings of wordy seas.

Mine are the untinged pores
of the artist without his paints,
of holy hands that are not saint's ;
can these be workman's hands
that show no grubby taints ;

Whose are the poets hands,
the nail-nibbed fingers on my wrists ?
A poet needs not hands but fists,
to take the mallet pen and
beat the lyrics from his rhyming lists.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES of the new contributors

Arturo Barea: Born in Badajoz, Spain, 1897. His early novels were a wide success and were the foundation of their author's international reputation. He has been living in England for some years.

Joyce Cary: Born Derry, 1888. Was concerned in the Irish co-operative organisation under Sir Horace Plunkett in 1913. Served in Nigerian Political Service till 1920. Is recognised as one of the leading novelists of to-day. Lives in England.

André Chamson: Born in the French Cévennes. Is one of France's leading writers. Acted as a liaison officer during World War II.

Lion Feuchtwanger: Born in Munich, 1884. Author of the world-famous *Jew Suss*. Now lives in California.

Storm Jameson: Born in Yorkshire and educated at Leeds University. Has published many novels and critical works which have gained the widest recognition.

André Maurois: Born in Elbeuf, France, 1885. A Commander of the Legion of Honour and a member of the *Académie Française*. Has a world-wide reputation.

Edwin Muir: Born in Scotland. Since 1950 has been Warden of Newbattle Abbey College. Is recognised as one of Britain's most distinguished poets.

R. K. Narayan: Born in India, 1908. Lives in a small town in Mysore round which all his books are centred. Has published novels and stories which have been acclaimed in Europe and America.

Ignazio Silone: Born in Pescina dei Marsi, Abruzzi, Italy, 1900. Was a member of the Italian Constituent Assembly from 1946-49. Is now a non-party Independent Socialist. As an author his reputation, since his early novel *Fontamara*, has been world-wide.

Georges Simenon: Born Liege, Belgium, in 1903. Is recognised as one of the leading and most distinguished writers of detective novels of to-day. Many of his books have been translated and filmed. Lives in America.

Lin Yutang: Born in China, 1895. Educated at St. John's University, Shanghai and at Harvard. Was Professor of English at Peking University from 1923-26. His novels of Chinese life have gained him a world-wide public.

Edward McCarthy: Born Bantry, Co. Cork, 1933. At present studying Arts at University College, Cork. This is his first publication.

Nick Nicholls: Born England, 1914, of Irish extraction. First book of poems was published in Dublin, 1942, where he wrote and painted.

Art O'Brien: Born in the Sudan, 1923, of Cork parents. Educated in Cork and Dublin. Now lives in England. This is his first publication.

James O'Rourke: Born Co. Carlow, 1934. Studied Commerce at Carlow Technical School and now works as a clerk in a local business house. This is his first publication.

nuafhoilsithe

DIALANN OILITHRIGH

— DONCHADH Ó CÉILEACHAIR —

9/6 trí dhíoltóirí leabhar nó ó

SÁIRSEÁL agus DILL, 11 Br. Gleannabhna, Baile Átha Cliath.